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TO WIN THE LOVE HE SOUGHT

BY

E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

AUTHOR OF

"THE YELLOW HOUSE," "A DAUGHTER OF ASTREA,"

"THE NEW TENANT," ETC.

DONALD W. NEWTON

156 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

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THE TROW PRESS, NEW YORK

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TO WIN THE LOVE HE SOUGHT

CHAPTER I

THE MEETING

THE soft mantle of a southern twilight had fallen upon land and sea, and the heart of the Palermitans was glad. Out they trooped into the scented darkness, strolling along the promenade in little groups, listening to the band, drinking in the cool night breeze from the sea, singling out friends, laughing, talking, flirting, and passing on. A long line of carriages was drawn up along the Marina, and many of the old Sicilian aristocracy were mingling with the crowd.

Palermo is like a night blossom which opens only with the first breath of evening. By day, it is parched and sleepy and stupid; by night, it is alive and joyous—the place itself becomes an *al fresco* paradise. It is night which draws the sweetness from the flowers. The air is heavy with the faint perfume of hyacinths and

wild violets, and a breeze stirring among the orange groves wafts a delicious aromatic odor across the bay. Long rays of light from the little semi-circle of white-fronted villas flash across the slumbering waters of the harbor. Out of door restaurants are crowded; all is light and life and bustle; every one is glad to have seen the last of the broiling sun; every one is happy and light-hearted. The inborn gaiety of the south asserts itself. Women in graceful toilettes pass backward and forward along the broad parade, making the air sweeter still with the perfume of their floating draperies, and the light revelry of their musical laughter.

'Tis a motley throng, and there is no respecting of persons. Townspeople, a sprinkling of the old nobility, and a few curious visitors follow in each other's footsteps. By day, those who can, sleep; by night, they awake and don their daintiest clothing, and Palermo is gay.

The terrace of the Hotel de l'Europe extends to the very verge of the promenade, and, night by night, is crowded with men of all conditions and nations, who sit before little marble tables facing the sea, smoking and drinking coffee and liqueurs. At one of these, so close to the promenade that the dresses of the passers-by almost touched them, two men were seated.

One was of an order and race easily to be distinguished in any quarter of the globe—an English country gentleman. There was no possibility of any mistake about him. Saxon was written in his face, in the cut of his clothes; even his attitude betrayed it. He was tall and handsome, and young enough not to have outlived enthusiasm, for he was looking out upon the gay scene with keen interest. His features were well cut, his eyes were blue, and his bronze face was smooth, save for a slight, well-formed moustache. He wore a brown tweed coat and waistcoat, flannel trousers, a straw hat tilted over his eyes, and he was smoking a briar pipe, with his hands in his pockets, and his feet resting upon the stone work.

His companion was of a different type. He was of medium height only, and thin; his complexion was sallow, and his eyes and hair were black. His features, though not altogether pleasing, were regular, and almost classical in outline. His clothes displayed him to the worst possible advantage. He wore black trousers and a dark frock coat, tightly fitting, which accentuated the narrowness of his shoulders. The only relief to the sombreness of his attire consisted in a white flower carefully fastened in his button-hole. He, too,

had been smoking, but his cigarette had gone out, and he was watching the stream of people pass and repass, with a fixed, searching gaze. Though young, his face was worn and troubled. He had none of the *sang froid* or the pleasure-seeking carelessness of the Englishman who sat by his side. His whole appearance was that of a man with a steadfast definite purpose in life—of a man who had tasted early the sweets and bitters of existence, joy and sorrow, passion and grief.

They were only acquaintances, these two men; chance had brought them together for some evil purpose of her own. When the Englishman, who, unlike most of his compatriots, was a young man of a sociable turn of mind, and detested solitude, had come across him a few minutes ago in the long, low dining-room of the hotel, and had proposed their sharing a table and their coffee outside, the other would have refused if he could have done so with courtesy. As that had been impossible, he had yielded, however, and they had become for a while companions, albeit silent ones.

The Englishman was in far too good a humor with himself, the place, and his surroundings, to hold his peace for long. He exchanged his pipe for a Havana, and commenced to talk.

"I say, this is an awfully jolly place! No idea it was anything like it. I'm glad I came!"

His *vis-à-vis* bowed in a courteous but abstracted manner. He had no wish to encourage the conversation, so he made no reply. But the Englishman, having made up his mind to talk, was not easily repulsed.

"You don't live here, do you?" he asked.

The Sicilian shook his head.

"No! It happens that I was born here, but my home was on the other side of the island. It is many years since I visited it."

He had made a longer speech than he had intended, and he paid the penalty for it. The Englishman drew his chair a little nearer, and continued with an air of increasing familiarity.

"It's very stupid of me, but, do you know, I've quite forgotten your name for the moment. I remember my cousin, Cis Davenport, introducing us at Rome, and I knew you again directly I saw you. But I'm hanged if I can think of your name! I always had a precious bad memory."

The Sicilian looked none too well pleased at the implied request. He glanced uneasily around, and then bent forward, leaning his elbow upon the table so that the heads of the two men almost touched. When they had come

into the place, he had carefully chosen a position as far away from the flaming lights as possible, but they were still within hearing of many of the chattering groups around.

"I do not object to telling you my name," he said in a low tone, sunk almost to a whisper, "but you will pardon me if I make a request which may appear somewhat singular to you. I do not wish you to address me by it here, or to mention it. To be frank, there are reasons for wishing my presence in this neighborhood not to be known. You are a gentleman, and you will understand."

"Oh, perfectly," the Englishman answered him, in a tone of blank bewilderment.

What did it all mean? Had he run off with some one else's wife, or was he in debt? One of the two seemed to be the natural conclusion. Anyhow, he did not want to know the fellow's name. He had only asked out of politeness, and if he were in any sort of scrape, perhaps it would be better not to know it.

"I tell you what," the Englishman explained, in the midst of the other's hesitating pause, "don't tell it me! I can call you anything you like for this evening. I daresay we I sha'n't meet afterwards, and if you want to keep it dark about your being here, why, then, I sha'n't be able to give you away—by accident,

of course. Come, I'll call you anything you like. Choose your name for the night!"

The Sicilian shook his head slowly.

"You have been told my name when I had the honor of being presented to you at Rome," he said, "and at any chance mention you might recall it. I prefer to tell it to you, and rely upon your honor."

"As you like."

"My name is Leonardo di Marioni!"

"By Jove! of course it is!" the Englishman exclaimed. "I should have thought of it in a moment. I remember Davenport made me laugh when he introduced us. His pronunciation's so queer, you know, and he's only been at Rome about a month, so he hasn't had time to pick it up. Good old Cis! he was always a dunce! I suppose his uncle got him in at the Embassy."

"No doubt," the Sicilian answered politely. "I have only had the pleasure of meeting your cousin once or twice, and I know him but slightly. You will not forget my request, and if you have occasion to address me, perhaps you will be so good as to do so by the name of 'Cortegi.' It is the name by which I am known here, and to which I have some right."

The Englishman nodded.

"All right. I'll remember. By the bye," he

went on, "I had the pleasure of meeting your sister in Naples, I believe. She is engaged to marry Martin Briscoe, isn't she?"

The Sicilian's face darkened into a scowl; the thin lips were tightly compressed, and his eyes flashed with angry light.

"I was not aware of it," he answered haughtily.

The other raised his eyebrows.

"Fact, I assure you," he continued suavely, not noticing the Sicilian's change of countenance. "Martin told me about it himself. I should have thought that you would have known all about it. Briscoe isn't half a bad fellow," he went on meditatively. "Of course, it isn't altogether pleasant to have a father who makes pickles, and who won't leave off, although he must have made a fine pot of money. But Martin stands it very well. He isn't half a bad fellow."

The Sicilian rose from his chair with a sudden impetuous movement. The moonlight fell upon his white, furious face and black eyes, ablaze with passion. He was in a towering rage.

"I repeat, sir, that I know of no such engagement!" he exclaimed, in a voice necessarily subdued, but none the less fierce and angry. "I do not understand your nation,

which admits into the society of nobles such men. It is infamous! In Sicily we do not do these things. For such a man to think of an alliance with a Marioni is more than presumption—it is blasphemy!"

"That's all very well, but I only know what I was told," the Englishman answered bluntly.

"It's no affair of mine. I'm sorry I mentioned it."

The Sicilian stood quite still for a moment; a shade of sadness stole into his marble face, and his tone, when he spoke again, was more mournful than angry.

"It may be as you say, Signor. I have been traveling, and for many months I have seen nothing of my sister. I have heard such rumors as you allude to, but I have not heeded them. The affair is between us two. I will say no more. Only this. While I am alive, that marriage will not take place!"

He resumed his seat, and conversation languished between the two men. The Englishman sat with knitted eyebrows, watching the people pass backward and forward, with an absent, puzzled look in his blue eyes. He had an indistinct recollection of having been told something interesting about this man at the time of their introduction. He was notorious for something. What was it? His memory

seemed utterly to fail him. He could only remember that, for some reason or other, Leonardo di Marioni had been considered a very interesting figure in Roman society during his brief stay at the capital, and that he had vanished from it quite suddenly.

The Sicilian, too, was watching the people pass to and fro, but more with the intent gaze of one who awaits an expected arrival than with the idle regard of his companion. Once the latter caught his anxious, expectant look, and at the same time noticed that the slim fingers which held his cigarette were trembling nervously.

"Evidently looking out for some one," he thought. "Seems a queer fish anyhow. Is it a man or a woman, I wonder?"

Soon he knew.

CHAPTER II

"SHE IS A SINGER"

THERE was a brief lull in the stream of promenaders. The Englishman turned round with a yawn, and ordered another cup of coffee. From his altered position he had a full view of the Sicilian's face, and became suddenly aware of an extraordinary change in it. The restlessness was gone; the watching seemed to be at an end. The fire of a deep passion was blazing in his dark eyes, and the light of a great wistful joy shone in his face. The Englishman, almost involuntarily, turned in his chair, and glanced round to see what had wrought the change.

He looked into the eyes of the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. A flood of silver moonlight lay upon the Marina, glancing away across the dark blue waters of the bay, and the soft dazzling light gently touched her hair, and gleamed in her dark, sweet eyes. She was tall, and clad in white flowing draperies clinging softly around her slim, girlish figure, and giving to her appearance an inexpressible

daintiness, as though they were indeed emblematic of the spotless purity of that fair young being. Was it the chastened light, or was there indeed something spiritual, something more than humanly beautiful in the delicate oval face—perfect in its outline, perfect in its faint coloring and stately poise? She was walking slowly, her every movement full of a distinctive and deliberate grace, and her head a little upturned, as though her thoughts were far away among the softly burning stars, rather than concerned with the fashionable and picturesque crowd which thronged around her. A remark from her companion, a girl of somewhat slighter stature and darker complexion, caused her to lower her eyes, and in doing so they fell upon the eager, impassioned gaze of the young Englishman.

Afterwards he was never ashamed to confess that that moment brought with it a peculiar lingering sweetness which never altogether died away. It was the birth of a new sensation, the most poignant of all sensations, although philosophers deny and materialists scoff at it. After all, there is something more than refined sensuality in love which has so sudden a dawning; there is a certain innate spirituality which sublimates and purifies it, so that the flame burns softly but brightly still

through joy and grief, mocking at satiety, surviving the sorrow of gray hairs, triumphing over the desolation of old age, and sweetening the passage to the grave. He was a headstrong, chivalrous young man, passionate, loyal, and faithful, among all his faults. That first love of his never grew cold, never lessened. It lasted forever. For some men it is not possible to give the better part of themselves up to the worship of a pure woman; selfishness forbids it. But this young Englishman who sat there spellbound, absorbed in the consciousness of this new and sweet emotion, was not one of these.

Suddenly she withdrew her eyes with a faint, conscious blush, and as she did so she saw for the first time the Sicilian. Her whole aspect swiftly changed. A terrified shudder swept across her features, and her lips parted with fear. She looked into a face but a moment before, at her first appearance, all aglow with passionate love, now black with suppressed anger and fierce jealousy. His eyes fascinated her, but it was the fascination of dread; and, indeed, his appearance was not pleasant to look upon. His thin form seemed dilated with nervous passion, and his eyes were on fire. Suddenly he conquered himself, and, with the swiftness of lightning across the wa-

ter, the fierceness died out of his face, leaving it pale almost to ghastliness in the moonlight. He half rose from his seat, and, lifting his hat, bowed low.

She answered his salutation timidly, and touched her companion on the arm. She, too, started as she saw that dark, thin figure gazing so steadfastly upon them, and her first impulse seemed to be to approach him. She stopped short on the promenade, and though there was a certain amount of apprehension in her dark eyes, there was also some pleasure, and her lips were parted in a half-welcoming, half-inviting smile. But he did not make any advance toward her; on the contrary, with a slight and almost imperceptible gesture, he motioned them to proceed. With a little wave of the hand, she obeyed him, and he resumed his seat, drawing his hat over his eyes, and no longer watching the stream of promenaders.

The Englishman, absorbed in his own sudden passion, had seen nothing out of the common in the brief interchange of glances between the trio. All that he noticed was that his companion had saluted the taller of the two girls, and that she had acknowledged the salutation. It was quite enough for him.

He leaned over the low palisade, watching her until she disappeared among the crowd,

scarcely daring to hope that she might look back, and yet determined to lose no opportunity of a farewell glance should she do so. When she was finally out of sight, he drew a long breath and turned toward his companion.

"Who is she?" he asked abruptly.

"I fear that I do not quite understand you," he said quietly, although his voice and limbs were trembling with passion; "to whom do you allude?"

"The girl in white who passed just now. You knew her! Tell me her name!"

"Why should I?"

"I wish to know it."

The Sicilian lit his cigarette. He was growing calmer, but the fingers which held the match were still shaking.

"Possibly. But that is no reason why I should tell it to you. That lady is a friend of mine, certainly, but it is not the custom in my country, however it may be in yours, to bandy a lady's name about a public place."

"But I am not asking out of curiosity," the other persisted, "nor am I a stranger to you."

"What is your motive, if it be not curiosity?" the Sicilian asked, with a dark shade stealing into his face. "You had better be careful, Signor; there is danger at hand for

any man who so much as directs an impertinent glance at either of those ladies."

The Englishman was far too deeply in earnest to be angry.

"You won't tell me, then?" he said simply.

"I will not."

"Certain?"

"Quite certain."

"Very good. I shall find out."

The Sicilian laid his hand upon the other's arm. His black eyes were flashing angrily, and his tone was threatening.

"Signor! a word of warning! I constitute myself the protector of those ladies. I have a very good right to do so. Any idle and public inquiries concerning them, or any attempt to obtrude an acquaintance upon them, I shall—punish! You understand!"

"Certainly," he answered. "You have only to prove the offense and the right of protectorship, and I shall be at your service. You probably know little concerning the men of my country. Let me tell you that we are not in the habit of forcing ourselves upon unknown ladies, nor in our respect for them are we second to the men of any nation in the world. I wish you good-evening, Signor."

He walked away with his head in the air, an object of much curiosity to the many scattered

little groups of dusky foreigners and Jews through which he passed. At the door of the hotel he paused for a moment, and then, instead of joining the stream of promenaders, he entered and slowly ascended the broad marble staircase toward his room. Just as he reached the first landing, however, he felt a light touch on his arm, and a guttural voice in his ear. He turned sharply round, and found before him one of the waiters—the one who had served him with his coffee outside.

"Well! what do you want?" he asked.

The man answered in a low tone, with his eyes glancing suspiciously around all the time.

"The Signor was inquiring the name of the lady who passed by," he said apologetically. "The Signor spoke loudly, and I could not choose but hear."

The Englishman came to a sudden standstill, and looked down into the ferretlike face and black eyes of the man who had followed him.

"Well?"

"I can tell it to the Signor."

"Look sharp then!"

"The Signor is generous," he remarked, with a cunning look. "I have risked my place by leaving the terrace without permission to bring him this news, and I am poor—very,

very poor!" he added, with a sudden drop in his voice which resembled a whine.

The Englishman threw a piece of gold into the brown, greedy palm.

"Tell it me, and be off," he said shortly.

The waiter—half Greek, half native, and a thorough rascal—bowed low, and his beadlike eyes glistened.

"The Signor is noble. The beautiful lady's name is Signorina Adrienne Cartuccio."

"The singer?"

"The same, Signor. The divine singer."

"Ah!"

The Englishman turned toward the wide, open window, and gazed steadfastly at the place in the crowd where she had vanished.

"She sings to-night, does she not?" he asked.

"Truly, Signor. Palermo is full of visitors from all parts of the island on purpose to hear her."

"At what time?"

"At nine o'clock, Signor, in the concert hall. If the Signor desires to hear her he should go early, for to-night is the only chance. She sings but once, and it is for the poor. They say that she has come to the Villa Fiolesse on the hill, to be away from the world, to rest."

The Englishman descended the stairs and

went slowly back to his seat. He had only one thought. In a few hours' time he would see her again. It would be Paradise!

He reached his table and sat down. The seat opposite to him was empty. The Sicilian had gone.

CHAPTER III

"BETTER THOU WERT DEAD BEFORE ME"

On the brow of the Hill Fiolesse, at a sharp angle in the white dusty road, a man and woman stood talking. On one side of them was a grove of flowering magnolias, and on the other a high, closely-trimmed hedge skirted the grounds of the Villa Fiolesse. There was not another soul in sight, but, as though the place were not secure enough from interruption, the girl, every now and then, glanced half fearfully around her, and more than once paused in the middle of a sentence to listen. At last her fears escaped from her lips.

"Leonardo, I wish that you had not come!" she cried. "What is the good of it? I shall have no rest till I know that you are beyond the sea again."

His face darkened, and his tone was gloomy and sad.

"Beyond the seas, while my heart is chained forever here, Margharita!" he answered. "Ah! I have tried, and I know the bitterness of it. You cannot tell what exile has been like

to me. I could bear it no longer. Tell me, child! I watched you climb this hill together. You looked back and saw me, and waited. Did she see me, too? Quick! answer me! I will know! She saw me on the Marina. Did she know that I was following her?"

"I think she saw you. She said nothing when I lingered behind. It was as though she knew."

The Sicilian clasped his hands, and looked away over the sea. The moonlight fell upon his weary pallid face, and glistened in his dark sad eyes. He spoke more to himself than her.

"She knew! And yet she would not wait to speak a single word to me! Ah! it is cruel! If only she could know how night by night, in those far-distant countries, I have lain on the mountain tops, and wandered through the valleys, thinking and dreaming of her—always of her! It has been an evil time with me, my sister, a time of dreary days and sleepless nights. And this the end of it! My heart is faint and sick with longing, and I hastened here before it should break. I must see her, Margharita! Let us hasten on to the villa!"

She laid her hand upon his arm. Her eyes were soft with coming tears.

"Leonardo, listen," she cried. "It is best

to tell you. She will not see you. She is quite firm. She is angry with you for coming."

"Angry with me! Angry because I love her, so that I risk my life just to see her, to hear her speak! Ah! but that is cruel! Let me go in and speak to her! Let me plead with her in my own fashion!"

She shook her head.

"Leonardo, the truth is best," she said softly. "Adrienne does not love you. She is quite determined not to see you again. Even I, pleading with tears in my eyes, could not persuade her. She has locked herself in her room while she prepares for the concert. You could not see her unless you forced yourself upon her, and that would not do."

"No, I would not do that," he answered wearily. "Margharita, there is a question; I must ask it, though the answer kill me. Is there—any one else?"

She shook her head.

"There is no one else, Leonardo, yet. But what matter is that, since it cannot be you? Some day it will come. All that a sister could do, I have done. She pities you, Leonardo, but she does not love you. She never will!"

He moved from the open space, where the moonlight fell upon his marble face, to the

shadow of the magnolia grove. He stood there quite silent for a moment. Then he spoke in a strained, hard voice, which she scarcely recognized.

"Margharita, you have done your best for me. You do not know what a man's love is, or you would not wonder that I suffer so much. Yet, if it must be, it must. I will give her up. I will go back to my exile and forget her. Yet since I am here, grant me a last favor. Let me see her to say farewell."

She looked up at him in distress.

"Leonardo, how can I? She has given orders that under no circumstances whatever are you to be admitted."

"But to say farewell!"

"She would not believe it. It has been so before, Leonardo, and then you have been passionate, and pleaded your cause all over again. I have promised that I will never ask her to see you again."

"Then let me see her without asking. You can find an opportunity, if you will. For my sake, Margharita!"

She laid her troubled, tear-stained face upon his shoulder.

"It is wrong of me, Leonardo. Yet, if you will promise me to say farewell, and farewell only——"

"Be it so! I promise!"

"Well, then, each night we have walked past the Marina, and home by the mountain road. It is a long way round and it is lonely; but we have Pietro with us, and on these moonlight nights the view is like fairy-land."

"And will you come that way home to-night, after the concert?"

"Yes."

"It is good."

"You will remember your promise, Leonardo," she said anxiously.

"I will remember," he answered. "And, Margharita, since this is to be our farewell, I have something to say to you also, before I pass away from your life into my exile. In Rome I was told a thing which for a moment troubled me. I say for a moment, because it was for a moment only that I believed it. The man who told me was my friend, or he would have answered to me for it, as for an insult. Shall I tell you, Margharita, what this thing was?"

Her face was troubled, and her eyes were downcast. The Sicilian watched her confusion with darkening brows. Since she made no answer, he continued:

"They told me, Margharita, that you, a

Marioni, daughter of one of Europe's grandest families, daughter of a race from which princes have sprung, and with whom, in the old days, kings have sought alliance, they told me that you were betrothed to some low American, a trader, a man without family or honor. They told me this, Margharita, and I answered them that they lied. Forgive me for the shadow of a doubt which crossed my mind, sister. Forgive me that I beg for a denial from your own lips."

She lifted her head. She was pale, but her dark eyes had an indignant sparkle in them.

"They did lie, Leonardo," she answered firmly, "but not in the fact itself. It is true that I am engaged to be married."

"Betrothed! Without my sanction! Margharita, how is that? Am I not your guardian?"

"Yes, but, Leonardo, you have been away, and no one knew when you would return, or where you were."

"It is enough. Tell me of the man to whom you are betrothed. I would know his name and family."

"Leonardo, his name is Martin Briscoe, and his family—he has no family that you would know of. It is true that he is an American, but he is a gentleman."

"An American! It is perhaps also true that he is a trader?"

His coolness alarmed her. She looked into his face and trembled.

"I do not know; it may be so. His father——"

The Sicilian interrupted her. His face was marble white, but his eyes were afire.

"His father! Spare me the pedigree! I know it! Margharita, stand there, where the moonlight touches your face. Let me look at you. Is it you, a daughter of the Marionis, who can speak so calmly of bringing this disgrace upon our name? You, my little sister Margharita, the proud-spirited girl who used to share in my ambitions, and to whom our name was as dear as to myself?"

"Leonardo, spare me!"

"Spare you? Yes, when you have told me that this is some nightmare, some phantasm—a lie! Spare you! Yes, when you tell me that this presumptuous upstart has gone back to his upstart country."

She dropped her hands from before her face, and stood before him, pale and desperate.

"Leonardo, I cannot give him up, I love him!"

"And do you owe me no love? Do you owe no duty to the grandeur of our race?

Noblesse oblige, Margharita! We bear a great name, and with the honor which it brings, it brings also responsibilities. I do not believe that you can truly love this man; but if you do, your duty is still plain. You must crush your love as you would a poisonous weed under your feet. You must sacrifice yourself for the honor of our name."

"Leonardo, you do not understand. I love him, and cannot give him up. My word is given; I cannot break it."

He drew a step further away from her, and his voice became harder.

"You must choose, then, between him and me; between your honor and your unworthy lover. There is no other course. As my sister, you are the dearest thing on earth to me; as that man's wife, you will be an utter stranger. I will never willingly look upon your face, nor hear you speak. I will write your name out of my heart, and my curse shall follow you over the seas to your new home, and ring in your ears by day and by night. I will never forgive; I swear it!"

He ceased and bent forward, as though for her answer. She did not speak. The deep silence was broken only by the far-off murmur of the sea, and the sound of faint sobbing from between her clasped hands. The sound of her

distress softened him for a moment; he hesitated, and then spoke again more quietly.

"Margharita, ponder this over. Be brave, and remember that you are a Marioni. Till to-morrow, farewell!"

CHAPTER IV

"DOWN INTO HELL TO WIN THE LOVE HE SOUGHT"

It was two hours later, and the Marina was almost deserted. The streets and squares, too, of the southern city were silent and empty. It seemed as though all Palermo had gathered together in that sprawling, whitewashed building, called in courtesy a concert hall. Flashes of light from its many windows gleamed upon the pavements below, and from the upper one the heads of a solid phalanx of men and women, wedged in together, threw quaint shadows across the narrow street. The tradespeople, aristocracy, and visitors of the place had flocked together to the concert, frantically desirous of hearing the great singer who, although so young, had been made welcome at every court in Europe. It was an honor to their island city that she should have visited it at all; much more that she should choose to sing there; and the quick Palermitans, fired with enthusiasm, rushed to welcome her. The heavy slumberous air was still vibrating with the shout which had greeted her first

appearance, and the echoes from across the scarcely rippled surface of the bay were lingering among the rocky hills on the other side of the harbor.

The Sicilian heard it as he threaded his way toward the poorer part of the city, and a dull red glow burned for a moment in his sallow cheeks. It maddened him that he, too, was not there to join in it, to feast his eyes upon her, and listen to the matchless music of her voice. Was she not more to him than to any of them? So long he had carried her image in his heart that a curious sense of possession had crept into all his thoughts of her. He was frantically jealous, heedless of the fact that he had no right to be. He would have felt toward the man on whom Adrienne Cartuccio had smiled, as toward a robber. She was his, and his only she should be. Years of faithful homage and unabated longing had made her so. His was a narrow but a strong nature, and the desire of her had become the mainspring of his life. His she should surely be! No other man had the right to lift his eyes to her. As he hurried through those silent streets, he forgot her many kindly but firm repulses. Jesuitical in his love, any means by which he might win her seemed fair and honorable. And to-night, though he was stooping

to treachery to possess himself of this long coveted jewel, he felt no shame; only his heart beat strong and fast with passionate hope. The moment had come at length for him to play his last card, and at the very prospect of success heaven itself seemed open before his eyes.

He had been threading his way swiftly, and with the air of one well acquainted with the neighborhood, through a network of narrow streets and courts, filthy and poverty stricken. At last he came to a sudden pause before a flight of steps leading down to the door of a small wine shop, which was little more than a cellar.

From the street one could see into the bar, and the Sicilian paused for a moment, and peered downward. Behind the counter, a stout, swarthy-looking native woman was exchanging coarse badinage with a man in a loose jersey and baggy trousers. There seemed to be no one else in the place, save another man who sat in the darkest corner, with his head buried upon his arms.

The Sicilian only hesitated for a moment. Then he pulled his soft hat lower over his eyes, and lighting a cigarette, to dispel as far as possible the rank stale odor of the place, stepped down and entered the wine shop.

Evidently he was not known there. The woman stared curiously at him as she passed the glass of curaçao for which he asked, and the man scowled. He took no notice of either, but, with his glass in his hand, made his way across the sawdust-covered floor to the most remote of the small tables.

A few feet only from him was the man who slept, or who seemed to sleep, and all around quaint shadows of the tall buildings outside stealing in through the open window almost shut the two men off from the rest of the wine shop where the gas jets hung. The Sicilian smoked on in silence; his neighbor commenced to move. Presently the woman and her admirer resumed their talk, with their heads a little closer together and their voices lowered. They were absorbed in themselves and their coarse flirtation. The man sipped more liquor, and the woman filled his glass with no sparing hand. The strong brandy ran through his veins quicker and quicker. He tried to embrace the woman, and failed, owing to the barrier between them. He tried again, and this time partially succeeded. Then he tried to clamber over the counter, but missed his footing and fell in a heap on the floor, where he lay, to all appearance, too drunk to get up—helpless and stupefied.

The woman peered over at him with a sneer on her face. Then she arranged the bottles in their places, and called out a noisy greeting to the Sicilian who was smoking silently among the shadows with only the red tip of his cigarette visible in the darkness. He made no reply. She yawned, and looked downward at the drunken man once more. There was no sign of life in his coarse face. He was wrapped deep in a drunken sleep, and he still had money in his pockets. Ah, well! It should be hers when these two strangers had gone.

She turned to a little recess behind the bar, and, approaching the wall, looked at herself in a cracked looking-glass which hung there. Something in her hair needed rearrangement, and she remained there straightening it with her fingers. From where she stood she was within hearing distance if any one descended the steps and entered the wine shop, so she did not hurry. The contemplation of her coarse features and small black eyes seemed to inspire her with a strange pleasure. She remained at the glass, turning her head from side to side with a curiously grotesque satisfaction. Then one of her large glass earrings was dull. She took it out, and rubbed it vigorously on her skirt, humming a popular tune to

herself the while. The whole thing took time; but what matter? There was no one in the vault save two drunken men, and another who chose to sit in the darkness without making any response to her advances. If a fresh customer had descended the greasy stone steps, and pushed open the rickety swing door, he would have found her in her place, ready with the usual coarse greeting or jest, should he chance to be a neighbor or an acquaintance. Meanwhile, she was happy where she was.

In the wine shop itself things were not exactly as she supposed. No sooner had her back been turned, than the man near whom the Sicilian had seated himself slowly raised his head, and looked around. Assured of her departure, and after a moment's contemplation of the man who lay upon the floor to all appearance so hopelessly drunk, he turned toward the Sicilian.

"My orders, Signor," he whispered. "It is to be to-night?"

"Yes."

"The Signorina will not listen to reason, then?"

In the darkness the Sicilian felt the deep flush which stole into his olive cheeks. He was not there without an effort. In all his deeds and thoughts he had always reckoned

himself as others had reckoned him, an honorable man. His presence in this place, and the means he was stooping to use, filled him with the most intense humiliation. Only one thing was stronger—his passionate love for Adrienne Cartuccio.

"Do not breathe the Signorina's name," he muttered. "Receive your instructions, but make no comments."

"Command, Signor; I am ready," was the whispered answer.

"First; have you succeeded as you expected? The carriage and mules and men?"

"In ten minutes I could have them all here, Signor. The task was not easy, but it is accomplished. They are at the Signor's disposal. All that remains is for you to give the orders."

The Sicilian was perfectly silent for a moment. The darkness hid his face—hid the shame which for a moment lowered it, the shame which an honorable gentleman feels when he stoops to dishonor. It passed away before the stronger feeling, and when he spoke his tone was firm though low.

"It is well. Listen, Pietro. The attempt is to be made to-night, in three hours' time. You will be prepared? The notice is sufficient?"

"More than sufficient, Signor. The sooner

the better. The mouths of my men are closed with gold, and they are carefully chosen; but, one and all, they love the wine, and wine, in its way, is as powerful as gold. See that animal yonder, Signor. My men love the drink as well as he, and before he reached that state he might have chattered away a dozen secrets."

The Sicilian watched the man who was lying on the sawdust-strewn floor. Something in his breathing attracted him, and he leaned forward.

"Is he asleep, do you think?" he whispered. "I thought I saw his eyes open."

Pietro rose, and crawling like a cat, drew close to the drunken man. He passed his hand lightly over him, and listened to his breathing. Finally he crept back to his seat.

"That is no spy!" he whispered; "he is only a common fisherman, and he is stupefied with drink. I watched him when he came in. Proceed, Signor. Let me know your plans."

The Sicilian continued, speaking as rapidly as possible. He had conspired before, but honorably, and with men of his own rank. But here—in this low den, with such a companion—it made his heart sick. He was only anxious to get away as speedily as possible.

"To-night the Signorina sings at the Town

Hall. She leaves there at ten o'clock, on foot, accompanied only by another lady and a manservant who is in my pay. She will dismiss her carriage, and walk. The road to the Villa Fiolesse, you know. They will pursue it past the turn, thinking to follow a winding path which leads from it into the grounds of the villa about half a mile further on. The road is quite deserted there, and sheltered by pine groves. At the entrance to the first grove the cart and mules must be in waiting—also your men. There will be no resistance; but, above everything, Pietro, remember this—no discourtesy or roughness to either of the ladies. Let them be treated firmly, but with the utmost respect. Remember that one will be my wife, and the other is my sister!"

"But you yourself, Signor! Shall you not be there?"

"No! If all goes well, I shall follow, and join you at Ajalito. At that place more mules must be purchased, as we shall take the mountain road to the Castle of Marioni, and the cart will be useless. Is all clear to you, Pietro?"

"It is clear, Signor!"

"It may be that you will require more money. Here are a hundred francs. Use what you will."

"I shall use all of them, Signor. To be well served requires good pay. The Signor shall be well served."

"Spend it as you will, and come to me afterwards for your own reward. I will go now to make my own preparations. Be faithful this night, Pietro, and your fortune is secured. I am not one to forget a service!"

"The Signor is a prince," Pietro answered, bowing. "See, the moon is behind a cloud. It is a propitious moment to leave this place without being observed. I, too, must go, but outside our ways lie apart."

"Come, then," the Sicilian answered, rising quickly. "But one last caution, Pietro. See that your men understand perfectly that, for any rudeness or ill-usage to either of the Signorinas, they will answer to me with their lives. It may be that I shall not join you before daybreak. If so, remember that the man who offends those whom you guard, by so much as a look, shall die. His corpse shall whiten on the mountains for carrion crows to peck at!"

"It is well, Signor. There is no fear."

They crept out of the door, opening and closing it noiselessly, ascended into the street, and separated. The sound of their footsteps died away upon the rude stone pavements.

For a minute or two unbroken silence reigned in the wine shop.

"Diabolo!"

The exclamation came from the man who had fallen while endeavoring to embrace the hostess, and who since, to all appearance, had been in a drunken sleep. A very remarkable change had come over him. He was sitting bolt upright on the floor, shaking the sawdust from his hair, and his dark eyes were no longer vacant, but bright and full of excitement. He peered cautiously over the counter. The woman who had repelled his advances was still loitering near the looking-glass. Then he stole softly on to his feet, and walking on tiptoe, and without the slightest difficulty, left the place. Outside he simulated once more the walk of a drunken man, and staggered down the street and out of sight.

Presently the hostess of the place, having arranged her head-dress to her own satisfaction, came out behind the counter. She leaned over and looked for her drunken admirer. After all, he had money in his pocket, and he was not such a bad fellow. She would take him into her little room behind, and let him sleep for a while more comfortably. But—but where was he? He was not there. She turned the light higher and looked around. There

was no one in the room at all. Two hopelessly drunken men and the stranger had left the place without making the slightest sound, or without calling for more drink. It was incredible. But it was true. The wine-shop keeper had never been so surprised in her life. Not only was she surprised, but she was frightened. The thing was beyond belief. The sweat broke out upon her forehead, and she crossed herself. The devil himself must have come and fetched them away, and, if so, why should he not fetch her. She was wicked enough. What a horrible thought.

Half a dozen men, the crew of a fishing boat, suddenly entered the court, filling the air with their voices, and descended the steps. She came to herself while serving them, and commenced to forget her fright. But she did not mention that little occurrence, and the very thought of a drunken man for days afterwards made her shudder.

CHAPTER V

TREACHERY

It was almost midnight, and Palermo lay sleeping in the moonlight. The concert was over, and the people who had shouted themselves hoarse with enthusiasm had dispersed at last to their homes. The last of the broad-wheeled, heavily-built carriages had rolled away through the white streets of the town. One by one the promenaders had left the Marina, and all sound had died away. There was a faint, sighing breeze in the orange groves around the bay, but scarcely a ripple upon the water. One man alone lingered drinking in the sweetness of the night. The Englishman sat on the last seat of the Marina, in the shadow of a cluster of orange trees.

He had seen her again—nay, more, he had heard her sing—this girl-nightingale, who had taken the world by storm. Chance had favored him, insomuch that he had been able to secure almost a front seat in the concert room, and the wonderful music of her voice rang still in his ears. He had stolen out here to try and

think it all over, and to calm the passion which had suddenly leaped up within him. It was quite a new experience through which he was passing; he scarcely knew himself. He was happy and miserable, sanguine and despondent, all in a moment. One question was always before him—one end, one aim. How was he to know her? How could he endure to live here, seeing her day by day for a brief while, without making her acquaintance? There was nothing to be hoped for from the Sicilian, who would not even tell him her name. Possibly, though, she would visit, or be visited by, some of the nobility of the place. This was almost his only hope. He had letters to most of them, and he made up his mind to present them all on the morrow.

He sat there dreaming, with a burned-out cigar between his teeth, and his eyes idly wandering over the blue Mediterranean. Suddenly the stillness was broken by the sound of a soft gliding footstep close at hand. He had heard no one approach, yet when he looked up quickly he found he was no longer alone. A man in the garb of a native peasant was standing by his side.

Naturally the Englishman was a little surprised. He half rose from his seat, and then resumed it as he recognized the dark, swarthy

face and black eyes of the waiter who had told him Adrienne Cartuccio's name.

"Hullo! What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"I was in search of the Signor!" was the hasty response. "For an hour I have sought him everywhere, and now it is by chance that I am successful."

The Englishman looked at him with suspicion. This change of dress was doubtless for the purpose of disguise. What was the meaning of it?

"Well, and now you've found me, what do you want?" he asked, watching him closely.

"I will tell the Signor. Is it not that he has an admiration for Mademoiselle Cartuccio, the singer? Well, she is in danger! It is for the Signor to rescue her."

The Englishman sprang up with sparkling eyes, and pitched his dead cigar into the sea.

"In danger!" he repeated breathlessly. "Quick! Tell me where!"

The man pointed inland.

"Do you see that belt of white road there, leading up into the hills?"

"Yes; what about it?"

"Have you noticed anything pass along it?"

"There was a heavy cart or carriage and some mules, I think, went by half an hour ago."

The native shrugged his shoulders.

"It was an hour, Signor, but no matter! Step back with me into the shadow of those olive trees. That is better. Now we cannot be seen, and I will explain."

The Englishman beat the ground with his foot.

"Explanations be damned!" he exclaimed. "Where is Mademoiselle Cartuccio? Quick!"

The man held up his hands, and spoke more rapidly.

"This evening I heard by accident of a plot to carry off Signorina Cartuccio by a rejected suitor. I hasten to inform the police, but on the way I pause. I say to myself, what shall I get for my pains, and for the risk I run? Nothing! Then I think of the Signor. I watched his face when the Signorina pass by, and I say to myself he has the passion of her. If I show him the way to save her he will be generous. He will win the lady, and he will reward poor Andrea."

"That's all right. Tell me what to do, and I will give you fifty pounds—anything you like. Don't waste time. Speak up!"

The man's eyes shone with cupidity. He went on rapidly:

"The Signor is a prince. Listen! Along yonder road, before many minutes have passed,

will come the Signorina Cartuccio with her friend, attended only by an aged servant. Men are waiting for them in the grove of orange trees above the Villa Fiolesse. Their orders are to carry off the two ladies to the other side of the island, where a place has been prepared for them. For an hour I have searched for the Signor, that he might procure aid, and so encounter these brigands, but in vain. I was in despair."

"I want no help! How many of the blackguards are there?"

"Four, Signor!"

"Natives?"

"Yes, Signor."

"And cowards, I suppose?"

The man smiled.

"They have not much bravery, Signor. I know the men."

"I wouldn't have anyone else here for the world," the Englishman said, shaking his fist.

"Does the Signor want a knife?" asked the man, thrusting his hand into his inner pocket.

"Not I. We don't understand that sort of thing in our country, my brave Andrea. Fisticuffs will settle this little matter, you'll see!"

The man looked up admiringly at the Englishman's commanding figure and broad shoulders.

"I think they will run away from the Signor when they see him," he whispered. "But let the Signor remember this: if one of them thrusts his hand inside his coat, so, do not wait one moment—knock him down or get out of his way. He will have the knife, and they know how to use it, these brigands."

"Tell me the name of their leader—I mean the fellow who is trying to carry off the Signorina. Will he be there?"

The man shook his head.

"I cannot tell the Signor his name. I dare not. I was once in his service, and he has powers—hush!"

The two men held their breath, keeping well in the shadow of the orange grove. They had reached the road, and in the distance they could hear the sound of approaching voices.

"I leave you now, Signor, whispered his companion to the Englishman. "I dare not be seen. To-morrow, at the hotel."

He glided noiselessly away. The Englishman scarcely heard him, he was listening intently. Light footsteps were coming along the winding road toward him, and soon a laughing voice rang out upon the night air.

"My dear Adrienne, don't you think we were a little foolish to walk home so late as

this? See, there is not a soul upon the promenade."

"*Tant mieux!*" was the light answer. "Is it not to escape from them all, that we came this way? The stillness is exquisite, and the night breeze from the sea, after that hot room, is divine. What a view we shall have of the bay when we get to the top of the hill."

"They say that this place is infested with robbers, and it is terribly lonely," was the somewhat fearful answer. "Why would you not let poor Leonardo come with us?"

"Because I did not want Leonardo, *cherie.* Leonardo is very good, but he wearies me by persisting to dwell upon a forbidden subject; and as for protection—well, I fancy Giovanni is sufficient."

They were passing him now so close that he felt impelled to hold his breath. He had only a momentary glimpse of them, but it was sufficient. A few yards behind, a sullen-looking servant was trudging along, looking carefully around. In the white moonlight their faces, even their expressions, were perfectly visible to him; Adrienne's rapt and absorbed by the still restful beauty of the dreaming night, and indifferent to all fear; her companion, whose dark eyes were glancing somewhat anxiously around her, and Giovanni's, whose furtive

looks, more expectant than apprehensive, marked him out to the Englishman as an accomplice in whatever devilry was afoot. Unseen himself, he watched them pass, and listened to their voices growing fainter and fainter in the distance. They were out of sight and out of hearing.

He was preparing to follow them, when suddenly another sound broke the stillness. He held his breath, and crouched down, watching. In a minute, two dark forms, keeping carefully in the shadows by the side of the road, crept stealthily past.

He waited till they, too, were out of sight, and then stood up with tingling pulses, but quite cool. Moving on tiptoe, he stepped lightly over the low stone wall into the road, and gazed after them.

The ascent was steep, and the road curved round and round in zig-zag fashion. On one side it was bordered by a thickly-growing orange grove, whose delicate perfume was sweetening the still languid air. On the other was a stretch of waste open country, separated from the road by a low wall. He chose the seaward side, and keeping under the shadow of the trees, followed them, his footsteps sinking noiselessly into the thick dust.

Once the two ladies paused to look back.

He stopped too; and the two bending figures between them drew closer into the shadows, and waited. He was some distance away, but the sound of her voice floated clearly down to him on a breath of that faint night air.

"Ah, how beautiful it is," she cried, pointing downward; "just a few steps, and we shall see the sea glistening through the leaves of the orange trees."

"I am sure that it is not prudent, Adrienne. We have come past the footpath down to the villa, and this upper road is so lonely. Listen! I fancied that I heard footsteps."

There was a moment's silence, then a low musical laugh which sounded to him like the sweetest music.

"It was the echo of our own, you foolish child. There is nothing to fear, and have we not Giovanni?"

Again they turned, and again he followed. Suddenly his heart gave a great bound. About fifty yards in front of the two girls was a rudely-built country carriage, drawn by a pair of mules and with a single man on the box. They had paused at such an unexpected sight, and seemed to be deliberating in whispers whether or no they should proceed. Before they had come to any decision, the two men had crept out from the shadow of the wall and trees into

the road, and with bent bodies hurried toward them.

He did not shout out or make any noise; he simply lessened the distance between him and them by increasing his pace. The two stooping forms, casting long, oblique shadows across the white, hard road, were almost level with their intended victims. Now the shadow of one of them crept a little in advance of the ladies, and Adrienne Cartuccio, seeing it, stepped suddenly back with a cry of alarm.

"Giovanni! Giovanni! There are robbers! Ah!"

The cry became a shriek, but it was instantly stifled by a coarse hand thrust upon her mouth. At the same moment her companion felt herself treated in a similar manner. They could only gaze into the dark ruffianly faces of their captors in mute terror. The whole thing had been too sudden for them to make any resistance, and Giovanni, their trusted escort, seemed suddenly to have disappeared. As a matter of fact, he was watching the proceedings from behind a convenient bowlder.

The man who was holding Adrienne pointed to the carriage, the door of which the driver had thrown open.

"This way, Signorina," he said. "It is useless to struggle. We shall not harm you."

She shook her head violently, and with a sudden effort thrust his hand away from her mouth.

"What do you want?" she cried. "Who are you? You can have my jewels, but I will never step inside that carriage. Help! help!"

He wound his arms around her, and, without a word, commenced dragging her across the road.

"You may shout as much as you like, he muttered. "There will only be echoes to answer you."

A sudden warning cry rang out from his companion, and, with a start, he released his victim. The Englishman had stepped into the middle of the group, and, before he could spring back, a swinging left-hander sent him down into the dust with a dull, heavy thud.

"You blackguard!" he thundered out. Then turning quickly round he faced the other man, who had sprung across the road with bent body, and with his right hand in his breast. There was a gleam of cold steel, but before he could use the knife which he had drawn, his arm was grasped and held as though by a vice, and slowly bent backward. He dropped the weapon, with a shriek of pain, upon the road, and fell on his knees before his captor.

The Englishman's grasp relaxed, and taking

advantage of it, the man suddenly jumped up, leaped over the wall, and disappeared in the plantation. Pursuit would have been impossible, but none of them thought of it.

The two ladies looked at their preserver standing in the middle of the road—fair and straight and tall, like a Greek god, but with a terrible fury blazing in his dark blue eyes.

"You are not hurt, I trust?" he asked, his breath coming quickly, for he was in a towering passion. He was not speaking to the darker of the two girls at all; in fact, he was unconscious of her presence. He was standing by Adrienne Cartuccio's side, watching the faint color steal again into her cheeks, and the terror dying out of her eyes, to be replaced by a far softer light. Her black lace wrap, which she had been wearing in Spanish fashion, had fallen a little back from her head, and the moonlight was gleaming upon her ruddy golden hair, all wavy and disarranged, throwing into soft relief the outline of her slim, girlish figure, her heaving bosom, and the exquisite transparency of her complexion. She stood there like an offended young queen, passionately wrathful with the men who had dared to lay their coarse hands upon her, yet feeling all a woman's gratitude to their preserver. Her eyes were flashing like stars, and her

brows were bent, but as she looked into his face her expression softened. Of the two sensations gratitude was the stronger.

"You are not hurt?" he repeated. "I am sorry that I did not get here sooner, before that fellow touched you."

She held out her hand to him with a little impetuous movement.

"Thanks to you. No, Signor," she said, her eyes suddenly filling with tears. "Oh, how grateful we are, are we not, Margharita?"

"Indeed, indeed we are. The Signor has saved us from a terrible danger."

He laughed a little awkwardly. Where is the Englishman who likes to be thanked?

"It is nothing. The fellows were arrant cowards. But what was the carriage doing here?"

He pointed along the road. Already the clumsy vehicle had become a black speck in the distance, swaying heavily from side to side from the pace at which it was being driven, and almost enveloped in a cloud of dust.

Adrienne shook her head. Margharita had turned away, with her face buried in her hands.

"I cannot imagine. Perhaps they were brigands, and intended to carry us off for a ransom."

The Englishman shrugged his shoulders.

"Odd sort of bandits," he remarked. "Why, they hadn't the pluck of a chicken between them, especially this one."

He touched the prostrate figure with his foot, and the two girls shuddered.

"He is—is not dead, is he?" Margharita asked.

"Not he. I shouldn't say that he was very badly hurt either," the Englishman declared, bending down and listening to his breathing. "More frightened than anything. He'll get up and be off directly we leave. You will let me see you home?" he continued, speaking to Adrienne.

She looked up at him with a gleam of humor in her wet eyes.

"You don't imagine that we should let you go and leave us here?" she said. "Come, Margharita."

The Englishman looked at the other girl, almost for the first time, as she came up and joined them. Her dark eyes were full of tears and her face was troubled. There was very little relief or thankfulness for her escape in her expression. The Englishman was no physiognomist, but he was a little puzzled.

"There is no danger now, Signorina," he said reassuringly. "To-morrow I will go to

the police, and I dare say that we shall get to the bottom of the whole affair."

She shuddered, but made no reply, walking on by their side, but a little distance apart. As for the Englishman, he was in paradise. To all intents and purposes, he was alone with Adrienne Cartuccio, listening to her low voice, and every now and then stealing a glance downward into those wonderful eyes, just then very soft and sweet. That walk through the scented darkness, with the far-off murmur of the sea always in their ears, was like the dawning of a new era in his life.

It was she who talked most, and he who listened. Yet he was very happy; and when they reached her villa, and he left them at the door, she gave him a white flower which he had found courage to beg for.

"May I call on you to-morrow?" he asked, trembling for the answer.

"If you would like to, yes," she answered readily. "Come early if you have nothing to do, and we will give you afternoon tea *à l'Anglaise*. By the bye," she added, a little shyly, "is there not something which you have forgotten?"

He divined her meaning at once.

"Of course, I ought to have told you my name!" he exclaimed hastily. "How

stupid of me. It is St. Maurice—Lord St. Maurice."

"Lord St. Maurice! Then are you not the fortunate possessor of that delightful little yacht in the harbor?"

"Yes, if you mean the *Pandora*, she's mine. Do you like sailing? Will you come for a sail?" he asked eagerly.

"We'll talk about it to-morrow," she laughed, holding out her hand. "Good-night."

He let her hand go. If he held it a moment longer, and a little more firmly than was absolutely necessary, was he much to blame?

"Good-night," he said. "Good-night, Signorina," he added, bowing to Margharita. "I shall come to-morrow afternoon."

Then he turned away, and walked with long swinging steps back to the hotel.

CHAPTER VI

"THE BITTER SPRINGS OF ANGER AND FEAR"

"MARGHARITA!"

She had found her way into a lonely corner of the villa grounds, and, with her head resting upon her hands, she was gazing across the blue sunlit waters of the bay. Below, hidden by the thickly-growing shrubs, was the white, dusty road, and the voice which disturbed her thoughts seemed to come from it. She pushed the white flowering rhododendrons on one side, and peered through.

"Leonardo!" she exclaimed. "Leonardo!"

She seemed surprised to see him standing there, pale, dusty, and with a great weariness shining out of his black eyes, and it did not occur to her to offer him any greeting. She could not say that she was glad to see him, and yet her heart ached when she looked into his pale, sorrowful face. So she was silent.

"Are you alone?" he asked.

"Yes. Adrienne is in the house, I believe."

"Then I am coming in."

She looked troubled, but she could not send him away. He clambered over the low paling,

and, pushing back the boughs of the shrubs which grew between them, made his way up the bank to her side.

"Have you been away?" she asked.

"Yes, I have been home. Home," he repeated bitterly. "I have wandered through the woods, and I have climbed the hills where we spent our childhood. I have looked upon the old scenes, and my heart is broken."

Her eyes filled with tears. For a moment her thoughts, too, went back to the days when they had been children together, and he had been her hero brother. How time had changed them both, and how far apart they had drifted. They could never be the same again. She knew it quite well. There had grown up a great barrier between them. She could not even pretend to sympathize with him, although her heart was still full of pity.

"Leonardo, I am sorry," she whispered. "How is it, I wonder, that all through life you seem to have set your heart upon things which are impossible."

"It is fate!"

"Fate! But you are a man, and man should control fate."

"Have I not tried?" he answered bitterly. "Tell me, do I so easily relinquish my great desire? Why am I here? Because I have said

to myself that I will not be denied. Adrienne shall be mine!"

She looked at him steadily.

"We have not met, Leonardo, since the night after the concert. Do you know that we had an adventure on the way home?"

"Tell me about it," he answered, looking away.

"Is there any need, Leonardo?"

A faint tinge of color stole into his olive cheek.

"You guessed then," he said. "Tell me, does she know? Has she any idea?"

"None."

"She does not suspect me at all?"

"No; she thinks that it was an ordinary attack by robbers, and that the carriage was to take us a little way into the interior, so that they might hold us and demand a ransom. It was her own idea; I said nothing. I feel as though I were deceiving her, but I cannot tell her. She would never look upon your face again, Leonardo."

"You must not tell her," he muttered. "Swear that you will not!"

She shook her head.

"There is no need. I am not anxious to denounce my own brother as a would-be abductor."

"Margharita, I was desperate," he cried passionately. "And that cursed Englishman, he has become my evil genius. It was a miserable chance that enabled him to become your preserver."

"It was a very fortunate one for you, Leonardo."

"What do you mean?" he cried sharply. "Tell me, has he been here?"

"Yes."

He seemed to calm himself with a great effort. He was on the threshold of what he had come to know. He must keep cool, or she would tell him nothing.

"Margharita," he said slowly, "the time is fast coming when I shall have no more favors to ask you. Will you remember that you are my sister, and grant me a great one now?"

"If I can, Leonardo."

"It is good. I shall not ask you anything impossible or unreasonable. Tell me the truth about Adrienne and this Englishman. Tell me how you have spent your days since this affair, and how often he has been here. Then tell me what you yourself think. Tell me whether she cares for him; and he for her. Let me hear the whole truth, so that I may know how to act."

There was a moment's silence. A yellow-breasted bird flew between them, and a shower

of rhododendron blossoms fell at their feet. The lazy murmur of insects floated upon the heavy afternoon air, so faint and breathless that the leaves which grew thick around them scarcely rustled. A clump of pink and white hyacinths grew out of the wall, the waxy heads bent with the weight of their heavy, bell-shaped petals. She snapped off a white blossom, and toyed with it in her fingers for a moment. The lazy joy of the hot afternoon seemed to grate upon her when she looked into that white, strained face, deep lined and suffering. What right had nature to put forth all her sweet sights and perfumes, to be so peaceful and joyous, while man, her master, could feel such agony? It was mockery, it was not right or fair.

She thrust the flower into his hand.

"Leonardo," she whispered, "remember our watchword, 'Endurance.' I will tell you everything. Lord St. Maurice came on the day after our adventure. He stayed till evening, and we walked with him on the Marina. The next day we went yachting with him. Yesterday and to-day he has spent nearly the whole of his time here. I believe that he is in love with Adrienne, and as for her, if she does not love him already, I believe that she soon will. You have asked for the truth, my brother, and

it is best that you should have it. Forgive me for the pain it must cause you."

He passed his arm round the gnarled branch of a small chestnut tree, and then, turning round, hid his face. There was a great lump rising in her throat, but she dared not attempt to console him. She knew that he was angry with her—that he blamed her for his fruitless love, and despised her for the lover she had chosen. In the days of their youth they had both been dreamers. He had been faithful to the proud, romantic patriotism which had been the keynote of their idealism; she, in his eyes at any rate, had been utterly faithless. Only her affection had remained steadfast, and even that he had commenced to doubt.

Presently he turned and faced her. His face was ghastly white, but his eyes were hot and red.

"Where is she?" he asked. "I am going to her. I am going to see with my own eyes, and hear with my own ears, whether this story of yours be true. Where is she?"

She looked at him doubtfully.

"Leonardo," she said, "forgive me; but you will frighten her if you go as you are now. Your clothes are all dusty and ragged, and you look as though you were on the threshold of a fever. Besides, she is asleep. Go down to the

hotel and change your clothes, and then ride up here to call. Somehow or other I will manage that she shall see you then."

He looked down at himself and smiled bitterly.

"It is true," he said, "I look but a sorry lover. Remember, Margharita, that I hold you to your promise. In an hour I shall return."

He left the grounds, and walked down the hill, with bent shoulders, and never a glance to the right or the left.

CHAPTER VII

COMFORT! COMFORT SCORNED OF DEVILS

"ADRIENNE, I am the happiest man in the world."

"For how long, sir?"

"*Pour la vie*," he answered solemnly.

Her hand stole softly into his, and there was a long silence between them. What need had they of words? It is only the lighter form of love, fancy touched by sentiment, which seeks for expressions by such means. Their love was different; a silent consciousness of each other's presence sufficed for them. And so they sat there, side by side, steeped in the deep, subtle joy of that perfect love which upon the nature of both the man and the woman had so chastening and spiritualizing an influence. There was a new music in their lives, a sweeter harmony than either of them had ever been conscious of before. The world had grown more beautiful—and it was for them. The love which widens and deepens also narrows. Humanity was a forgotten factor in their thoughts. All that they saw and dreamed of was theirs to taste, to admire and to enjoy to-

gether. It was for them that the silvery moon and the softly burning stars cast upon the sleeping earth a strange new beauty. It was for them the air hung heavy with the faint perfume of spices, and the mingled scents of heliotrope and violets. It was for them that the dark pine trees waved softly backward and forward against the violet sky; for them that the far-away sea made melancholy music against the pebbly beach, and the soft night wind rustled among the tree tops in the orange groves. All nature was fair for their sakes. It is the grand selfishness of love—a noble vice.

"Adrienne!"

They both started and looked round. The voice was harsh and agitated, and it broke in like a jarring note upon their sweet, absorbed silence. It was Leonardo di Marioni who stood before them on the balcony—Leonardo, with white face and darkly-gleaming eyes. To Lord St. Maurice, that stifled cry had sounded like the hiss of the snake in paradise, and when he looked up the simile seemed completed.

"Is it you, Leonardo?" Adrienne said, letting go her lover's hand, and leaning back in her chair. "Your entrance is a little unceremonious, is it not? Were there no servants to announce you, or to bring me word of your presence? I dislike surprises."

"And I, too, Adrienne—I, too, dislike surprises," he answered, his voice quivering with passion. "I find one awaiting me here."

She rose and stood facing him, cold but angry.

"You are forgetting yourself, Count di Marioni, and your speech is a presumption. We have been friends, but, if you wish our friendship to continue, you will alter your tone. You have no right to speak to me in that tone, and I expect an apology."

His lips quivered, and he spoke with a strange bitterness.

"No right! Ay, you say well 'no right,' Adrienne. Will you spare me a few moments alone? I have a thing to say to you."

She frowned and hesitated for a moment. After all, she had a woman's heart, and she could not choose but pity him.

"Will not another time do, Leonardo?" she asked almost gently. "You see I have a visitor."

Yes, he saw it. He had looked up into the handsome, debonair face, with that proud, happy smile upon the parted lips, from the garden path below. How he hated it.

"I may be summoned away from Palermo at any moment," he said. "Cannot you spare me a short five minutes? I will go away then."

She looked down at her lover. He rose to his feet promptly.

"I'll have a cigar among the magnolias," he exclaimed. "Call me when I may come up."

A look passed between them which sent a swift, keen pain through the Sicilian's heart. Then Lord St. Maurice vaulted over the balcony, alighting in the garden below, and they were alone.

"Adrienne!" Leonardo cried, and his voice was low and bitter, "I dare not ask, and yet I must know. Tell me quickly. Don't torture me. You care for this Englishman?"

"Yes."

"You love him?"

"Dearly. With all my heart."

"You are going to marry him?"

"Yes."

And not all her pity could keep the joy from her tone as she uttered the last monosyllable.

"My God! My God!"

The suffering in his white face was awful to see. Her eyes filled with tears. She knew that she had done this man no wrong, that he had never had a single word of definite encouragement from her, that, time after time, she had told him that his love was hopeless. Yet her heart was heavy as she watched his anguish.

"Leonardo!" she said softly, "I am sorry.

But surely you do not blame me? Is it my fault that I love him, and not you? Have I not begged you often to accept the only answer I could ever give you? Be generous, Leonardo, and let us be friends."

It was several moments before he spoke, and then it seemed as though there had been a conflict in the man, and the worse half had conquered. The dumb grief in his eyes, which had been so piteous to witness, had changed suddenly into a furious, passionate anger. He shook with the violence of his emotions, and though she was used to his stormy, impetuous nature, she was frightened.

"Friends! A curse upon such folly! Is it for friendship's sake that I have followed you here at the risk of my life, just to breathe the same air, to look but now and then into your face? Ah! Adrienne! Adrienne! listen once more to me. Do you think that he can love as I do? Never! never! I know that sluggish English temperament. Their wives are their servants or their dolls. Their passion is the passion of animals, and they have not even constancy."

She held out her hand. He had destroyed her pity. Henceforth he was obnoxious to her.

"Leave me," she commanded. "You are

talking of what you do not understand. You are insulting me. I detest you!"

"Detest me!" he laughed hysterically, and the fire in his eyes grew brighter. "Since when? Since this cursed Englishman whispered his lies into your ears and stole you from me. Nay, do not shake your head. Mine you would have been some day, as surely as now you have made my life a hell. My love would have conquered in the end. It would have worn away your coldness and your resistance drop by drop. Mother of God! it shall conquer! Do I come of a race who are content to stand calmly by and see the woman they love stolen away by strangers? No!"

He stopped short, and there was a strange look in his face. Adrienne saw it, and trembled.

"Leonardo," she said, "I call a man who cannot bear a disappointment a coward. I do not love you; and under no circumstances whatever would it have been possible for me ever to have married you. Never! never!"

He turned on his heel and walked away.

"We shall see!" he said. "*Au revoir*, my cousin."

The emphasis in his tone, and a certain fixed look in his face chilled her. She held up her hands, and he stayed.

"Listen!" she said, speaking slowly, and with her eyes fixed steadily upon him. "I do not wish to think ill of you; I do not wish to think that you could harm the man I love; but, if you did—if you did, I say—you should taste a woman's vengeance! You think me weak, but there are things which will fire the blood and steel the nerve of a weaker woman than I am. Remember, Leonardo! Lift but your little finger against Lord St. Maurice, and all ties of kindred and country are forgotten. Those means which lie ready to my hand, I will use! I have warned you! Remember!"

Her tone had passed from earnestness to solemnity; her attitude, her final gesture, were full of dramatic grace. Beside her, he appeared mean and insignificant.

"I thank you for your candor, cousin," he said slowly. "If I harm your lover——"

"If you harm him," she interrupted fiercely, "you will win my undying hate, even while you are undergoing my vengeance. You know my power, Leonardo; you know the means which lie ready to my hand. Never doubt but that I shall use them."

He turned round and walked out of the house, passing Lord St. Maurice in the garden without even glancing toward him. In the road he paused for a moment, watching the

long shadows pass quivering across the dark hills, and the gleam of the moonlight upon the water far away below.

"She would never dare!" he murmured to himself. "She is a woman, and she would forget."

CHAPTER VIII

"DEATH IN THE FACE, AND MURDER IN THE HEART"

LORD ST. MAURICE was in a good humor with himself and the entire world that night. He had spent nearly the whole of the day with the woman he loved, and whom he was shortly to marry, and with the prospect of another such day on the morrow, even his temporary exile from paradise was not a very severe trial. He was an ardent suitor, and deeply in love, but an hour or two alone with a case of excellent cigars, with delightful thoughts to keep him company, the softest air in Europe to breathe, and one of the most picturesque sights to look upon, could scarcely be esteemed a hardship. Above him, among the woods, twinkled the bright lights of the Villa Fiolesse which he had just quitted, and below was the gay little Marina, still dotted about with groups of men in soft hats and light clothes, and bright-eyed, laughing women, whose musical voices rang out on the still night air with strange distinctness.

Through the clinging magnolia bushes and

rhododendron shrubs he pushed his way downward, the red end of his cigar shining out like a signal light in the semi-purple darkness. Every now and then he stopped to take a breath of air perfumed by a clump of hyacinth, or some star-shaped flower which had yielded up its sweetness to the softly-falling night. Now and then, too, he took a lover's look at the stars, and downward to the softly-heaving bosom of the Mediterranean. All these things seemed to mean so much more to him now! Adrienne had changed the world, and he was looking out upon it with different eyes. Sentiment, which before he had scoffed at a little, as became a sturdy young Briton but lately escaped from public school and college, had suddenly become for him something akin to a holy thing. He was almost a poet that night—he who had scarcely read a line of what the world calls poetry since his school days. There was a man whom he had hated all his life. Just then he began to think of him without a particle of anger or resentment. If he could have met him there, among those drooping, white-flowering shrubs, he felt that he could have shaken his hand, have asked him heartily after his health, and doubtless have fixed a day to dine with him. The world was a capital place, and Palermo was on the threshold of heaven.

His big, boyish heart was full to over-flowing. Oh! it is a fine thing to be in love!

From the present he began to think a little of the future. He was right in the clouds, and he began to dream. At twenty-five years old imagination is the master of the man; at forty the situations are reversed; but in losing the upper hand imagination often loses its power and freshness. Lord St. Maurice was in his twenty-sixth year, and he began to dream. He was his own master, and he was rich. There was a fine estate in Eastshire, a shooting lodge in Scotland, and a box in Leicestershire. Which would Adrienne prefer? How delightful it would be to take her to them in the proper seasons, and find out which one pleased her most. When they reached England, after a cruise as far as Cairo and back along the Mediterranean, July would be on the wane. It was just the best time. They would go straight to Scotland and have a few days alone upon those glorious moors before the shooting commenced. He remembered, with a little laugh, the bachelor invitations which he had given, and which must now be rescinded. Bother bachelor invitations! Adrienne was sure to like Scotland. This southern land with its profusion of flowers, its deep, intense coloring, and its softly-blowing winds, was beautiful enough in its

way, but the purple covered moors and cloud-topped hills of Scotland had their own charm. Adrienne had never seen heather; and his long, low cottage was set in a very sea of it. How pleasant the evening would be, out on the balcony, with the red sun sinking down behind Bathness Hill. Ah! how happy they would be. Life had never seemed so fair a thing!

He was on the Marina by this time, elbowing his way among the people who were still lazily walking backward and forward, or standing in little knots talking. The open-air restaurant, too, was crowded, but there were a few vacant seats, and among them the little iron chair in which he had been lounging on that evening when Adrienne Cartuccio had passed by among the crowd. He stopped short, and stepping lightly over the railing, drew it to him, and sat down. The busy waiter was by his side in a moment with coffee and liqueurs, and taking a cigar from his case he began meditatively to smoke.

Since sundown the hot air had grown closer and more sulphurous, and away westward over the waters the heavens seemed to be continually opening and closing, belching out great sheets of yellow light. A few detached masses of black clouds were slowly floating across the starlit sky. Now one had reached the moon,

and a sudden darkness fell upon the earth. With such a lamp in the sky illuminations in the hotel gardens were a thing unheard of, and the effect was singular. Only the red lights of the smokers were visible, dotted here and there like glow-worms. Conversation, too, dropped. Men lowered their voices, the women ceased to make the air alive with the music of their laughter. It was the southern nature. When the sky was fair, their hearts were light and their voices gay. Now there was a momentary gloom, and every one shivered.

The Englishman looked up at the cloud, wondered whether there would be a storm, and calmly went on smoking. The sudden hush and darkness meant nothing to him. In his state of mind they were rather welcome than otherwise. But in the midst of the darkness a strange thing happened.

He was neither superstitious nor impressionable. From either weakness he would contemptuously, and with perfect truth, have declared himself altogether free. But suddenly the sweet, swiftly-flowing current of his thoughts came to a full stop. He was conscious of a cold chill, which he could not in any way explain. There had been no sound of footsteps, nothing to warn him of it, but he fancied himself abruptly encountered by some

nameless danger. The perspiration broke out upon his forehead, and the cigar dropped from his fingers. Was it a nightmare, the prelude to a fever? Was he going mad? Oh! it was horrible!

By a great effort of will he contrived to raise his eyes to the cloud. It had almost passed away from the face of the moon. The main body of it was already floating northward, only one long jagged edge remained. There could be only a second or two more of this unnatural gloom. His heart was thankful for it. Ah! what was that? He bit his tongue hard, or he would have called out. Either he was dreaming, or that was the warm panting breath of a human being upon his cheek.

He sprang up, with his arm stretched out as though to defend himself, and holding his breath; but there was no sound, save the dull murmur of whispered conversation around. One glance more at the cloud. How slowly it moved. Ah! thank God! the light was coming. Already the shadows were moving away. Voices were being raised; figures were becoming distinct; in a moment the moon would be free.

It was all over. Laughing voices once more filled the air. The waiters were running about more busily than ever; people rubbed their eyes

and joked about the darkness. But the Englishman sat quite still, holding in his hand a long, curiously-shaped dagger, which the first gleam of moonlight had shown him lying at his feet.

He was no coward, but he gave a little shudder as he examined the thing, and felt its blueish steel edge with his finger. It was by no means a toy weapon; it had been fashioned and meant for use. What use? Somehow he felt that he had escaped a very great danger, as he put the thing thoughtfully into his pocket, and leaned back in his chair. The shrill voices and clatter of glasses around him sounded curiously unreal in his ears.

By degrees he came to himself, and leaning forward took a match from the little marble table, and re-lit his cigar. Then, for the first time, he noticed with a start, that the chair opposite to him was occupied, occupied, too, by a figure which was perfectly familiar. It was the Sicilian who sat there, quietly smoking a long cigarette, and with his face shaded by the open palm of his hand.

Lord St. Maurice made no sign of recognition. On the contrary, he turned his head away, preferring not to be seen. His nerves were already highly strung, and there seemed to him to be something ominous in this second

meeting with the Sicilian. If he could have been sure of being able to do so unnoticed, he would have got up and gone into the hotel.

"Good-evening, Signor!"

Lord St. Maurice turned and looked into the white, corpse-like face of the Sicilian. It told its own story. There was trouble to come.

"Good-evening, Signor," he answered quietly.

The Sicilian leaned over the table. There were gray rims under his eyes, and even his lips had lost their color.

"A week ago, Signor," he remarked, "we occupied these same seats here."

"I remember it," Lord St. Maurice replied quietly.

"It is well. It is of the events which have followed that night that I desire to speak, if you, Signor, will grant me a few moments of your time?"

"Certainly," the Englishman replied courteously. After all, perhaps the fellow did not mean to quarrel.

"I regret exceedingly having to trouble you, Signor, with a little personal history," the Sicilian continued. "I must tell you, at the commencement, that for five years I have been a suitor for the hand of the Signorina Adrienne Cartuccio, my cousin."

"Second cousin, I believe," Lord St. Maurice interposed.

The Sicilian waved his hand. It was of no consequence.

"Certain political differences with the Imperial party at Rome," he continued, "culminated two years ago in my banishment from Italy and Sicily. You, I believe, Lord St. Maurice, are of ancient family, and it is possible that you may understand to some extent the bitterness of exile from a country and a home which has been the seat of my family for nearly a thousand years. Such a sentence is not banishment as the world understands it; it is a living death! But, Signor, it was not all. It was not even the worst. Alas, that I, a Marioni, should live to confess it! But to be parted from the woman I love was even a sorer trial. Yet I endured it. I endured it; hoping against hope for a recall. My sister and I were orphans. She made her home with the Signorina Cartuccio. Thus I had news of her continually. Sometimes my cousin herself wrote to me. It was these letters which preserved my reason, and consciously or unconsciously, they breathed to me ever of hope.

"Not Adrienne's, I'll swear," the Englishman muttered to himself. He was a true Brit-

on, and there was plenty of dormant jealousy not very far from the surface.

The Sicilian heard the words, and his eyes flashed.

"The Signorina Cartuccio, if you please, Signor," he remarked coldly. "We are in a public place."

Lord St. Maurice felt that he could afford to accept the rebuke, and he bowed his head.

"My remark was not intended to be audible!" he declared.

"For two years I bore with my wretched life," the Sicilian continued, "but at last my endurance came to an end. I determined to risk my liberty, that I might hear my fate from her own lips. I crossed the Alps without molestation, and even entered Rome. There I was watched, but not interfered with. The conclusion I came to was, that as long as I lived the life of an ordinary citizen, and showed no interest in politics, I was safe. I crossed to Palermo unharmed. I have seen the Signorina, and I have made my appeal."

The Englishman dropped his eyes and knocked the ash from his cigar. The fellow was coming to the point at last.

"You, Signor," the Sicilian continued, in a tone which, although it was no louder, seemed to gain in intensity from the smoldering pas-

sion underneath, "you, Signor, know what my answer was, for you were the cause. I have not told you this much of my story to win your pity; I simply tell it that I may reason with you. I have tried to make you understand something of the strength of my love for the Signorina. Do you think that, after what I have risked, after what I have suffered, that I shall stand aside, and see another man, an alien, take her from me? I come of a race, Signor, who are not used to see the women they love chosen for other men's wives. Have you ever heard of Count Hubert di Marioni, who, with seven hundred men, carried off a princess of Austria from her father's court, and brought her safely through Italy here to be one of the mothers of my race? It was five hundred years ago, and, among the ruins of ancient kingdoms, the Marionis have also fallen in estate. But the old spirit lingers. Lord St. Maurice, I am not a blood-thirsty man. I do not wish your life. Go back to your country, and choose for a bride one of her own daughters. Give up all thought of the Signorina di Cartuccio, or, as surely as the moon yonder looks down upon you and me, I shall kill you."

Lord St. Maurice threw his cigar away and shrugged his shoulders. The affair was going to be serious, then.

"You must forgive me, Signor, if I do not quite follow you," he said slowly. "The custom in our countries doubtless differs. In England it is the lady who chooses, and it is considered—pardon me—ill-mannered for a rejected suitor to have anything more to say."

"As you remark, the ideas and customs of our countries differ," the Sicilian rejoined. "Here a nobleman of my descent would consider it an everlasting shame to stand quietly on one side, and see the woman whom he worshiped become the bride of another man, and that man an alien. He would be esteemed, and justly, a coward. Let us waste no more words, Signor. I have sought you to-night to put this matter plainly before you. Unless you leave this island, and give up your pretensions to the hand of the Signorina Cartuccio, you die. You have climbed for the last time to the Villa Fiolesse. Swear to go there no more; swear to leave this island before day breaks to-morrow, or your blood shall stain its shores. By the unbroken and sacred oath of a Marioni, I swear it!"

To Lord St. Maurice, the Sicilian's words and gestures seemed only grotesque. He looked at him a little contemptuously—a thin, shrunken-up figure, ghastly pale, and seeming all the thinner on account of his somber black

attire. What a husband for Adrienne! How had he dared to love so magnificent a creature. The very idea of such a man threatening him seemed absurd to Lord St. Maurice, an athlete of public school and college renown, with muscles like iron, and the stature of a guardsman. He was not angry, and he had not a particle of fear, but his stock of patience was getting exhausted.

"How are you going to do the killing?" he asked. "Pardon my ignorance, but it is evidently one of the customs of the country which has not been explained to me. How do you manage it?"

"I should kill you in a duel!" the Sicilian answered. "It would be easily done."

The Englishman burst out laughing. It was too grotesque, almost like a huge joke.

"Damn you and your duels!" he said, rising to his feet, and towering over his companion. "Look here, Mr. di Marioni, I've listened to you seriously because I felt heartily sorry for you; but I've had enough of it. I don't know whether you understand the slang of my country. If you do, you'll understand what I mean when I tell you that you've been talking 'bally rot.' We may be a rough lot, we Englishmen, but we're not cowards, and no one but a coward would dream of giving a girl up for

such a tissue of whimperings. Be a man, sir, and get over it, and look here—none of this sort of business!"

He drew the dagger from his breast pocket, and patted it. The Sicilian was speechless and livid with rage.

"You are a coward!" he hissed. "You shall fight with me!"

"That I won't," Lord St. Maurice answered good-humoredly. "Just take my advice. Make up your mind that we both can't have her, and she's chosen me, and come and give me your hand like a man. Think it over, now, before the morning. Good-night!"

The Sicilian sprang up, and looked rapidly around. At an adjoining table he recognized two men, and touched one on the shoulder.

"Signors!" he cried, "and you, Signor le Capitaine, pardon me if I ask you for your hearing for an instant. This—gentleman here has insulted me, and declines to give me satisfaction. I have called him a coward and a rascal, and I repeat it! His name is Lord St. Maurice. If he forfeits his right to be considered a gentleman, I demand that his name be struck off the visitors' club."

The three men had risen to their feet. Two of them were gentlemen of the neighborhood with whom Lord St. Maurice had a bowing ac-

quaintance. The third was a French officer. They looked inquiringly at Lord St. Maurice.

"It's quite true, gentlemen," he said with easy self-possession. "He's been calling me all the bad names under the sun, and I have declined to give him what he calls satisfaction. I haven't the least objection to your knowing it."

The two Palermitans looked at one another doubtfully. The officer, giving his moustache a twist, stepped forward and bowed.

"Might we inquire your reasons for declining the duel?" he asked.

The Englishman shrugged his shoulders.

"Certainly," he answered. "In the first place, I am an officer in the service of Her Majesty the Queen, and duelling is strictly forbidden; in the second, Signor di Marioni is too excited to know what he is talking about."

"In England, Signor, your first objection is valid; here, it is scarcely so. As to the latter, Monsieur le Count seems now to be perfectly composed. I am on the committee of the club, and I fear that I must erase your name if you persist in your refusal."

"I don't care two straws about your club," Lord St. Maurice answered carelessly. "As for the duel, I decline it, once and for all. We Englishmen have a code of honor of our own,

and it is more to us than the custom of the countries which we chance to visit. I wish you good-night, gentlemen."

They fell back, impressed in spite of themselves by the coolness and hauteur of his words. Suddenly, with the swiftness of a tiger-cat, the Sicilian leaped forward and struck the Englishman on the cheek.

"Perhaps you will tell us all, Signor, how the men of your country resent an insult such as that," he cried.

Every one turned round at the sound of the scuffle. The eyes of all were upon the Englishman, who stood there, head and shoulders above all the crowd, with blazing eyes and pale cheeks. He was in a towering passion, but his voice never shook or faltered.

"You shall see for yourself, Signor!" he cried.

The Sicilian struggled, but he was like a child in the Englishman's arms. He had caught him up in a vice-like grasp, and held him high over the heads of the astonished onlookers. For a moment he seemed as though he were going to throw him right out of the restaurant on to the Marina, but at the last moment he changed his mind, and with a contemptuous gesture set him down in the midst of them, breathless and choking.

"You can send your seconds as soon as you like," he said shortly. "Good-evening, gentlemen."

They fell back before him like sheep, leaving a broad way right into the hotel, through which he passed, stern and self-possessed. The Sicilian watched him curiously, with twitching lips.

"There goes a brave man," whispered one of the Palermitans to the French officer. "But his days are numbered."

The Frenchman gazed at the Sicilian and nodded. There was death in his face.

CHAPTER IX

'Ah! why should love, like men in drinking songs,
Spice his fair banquet with the dust of earth?'

LORD ST. MAURICE walked straight into his room without perceiving that it was already occupied. He flung his hat into a corner, and himself into an easy-chair, with an exclamation which was decidedly unparliamentary.

"D—n!" he muttered.

"That's a lively greeting," remarked a voice from the other end of the room.

He looked quickly up. A tall figure loomed out of the shadows of the apartment, and presently resolved itself into the figure of a man with his hands in his pockets, and a huge meerschaum pipe in his mouth.

"Briscoe, by Jove! How long have you been here?"

"About two hours. I've been resting. Anything wrong downstairs? Thought I heard a row."

"Strike a light, there's a good fellow, and I'll tell you."

The new-comer moved to the window, and pulled aside the curtain.

"Moon's good enough," he remarked. "I hate those sickly candles. Great Scott! what's the matter with you? You look as black as thunder."

Lord St. Maurice told him the whole story. Martin Briscoe listened without remark until he had finished. Then he pushed the tobacco firmly down into the bowl of his pipe and re-lit it, smoking for a few minutes in silence.

"I tell you what, Maurice," he said at length, "of all the blood-thirsty little devils that ever were hatched, that Marioni takes the cake. Why, I'm going to fight him myself to-morrow morning."

"What!" cried St. Maurice, starting up in his chair.

"Fact, I assure you. Margharita told me that he was going to be troublesome, but I'd no idea that he was such a little spitfire. I landed two hours ago, and came straight here. I'd scarcely had a tub, and made myself decent, when in the little beggar walks, and kicks up no end of a row. I listened for a bit, and then told him to go to hell. In five minutes he'd got the whole thing arranged, seconds and all. To-morrow morning, at 6.30, on the sands, 'll see me a dead man, if he can use his tools as well as he can talk, little beast."

"Briscoe, this is a horrible mess," Lord St.

Maurice declared emphatically. "I don't know what you think of duels; I hate them."

"It isn't duels I hate, it's the being spitted," Briscoe answered gloomily. "I can fence a bit, but it's always been with foils. I'm not used to swords, and I expect that fellow is a regular 'don' at it. There's a sort of corpse-like look about him, anyway. Got any 'baccy, St. Maurice? Mine's so beastly dry."

"Help yourself, old fellow. Who the devil's that?"

There was a knock at the door, and one of the servants of the hotel appeared. With some difficulty, for he was a native, and spoke French execrably, he explained that there were some gentlemen below who desired to speak with Lord St. Maurice.

The two men exchanged glances.

"My time has come, you see," Lord St. Maurice remarked grimly. "Wait for me."

In the deserted *salle à manger* the French officer and one of the Palermitan gentlemen were talking together. The latter approached Lord St. Maurice and drew him on one side.

"I do not know how you may be situated here for friends, Lord St. Maurice," he said, "but I felt that you would only consider it courteous of me to offer my services to you in case you are without a second in this affair.

My father wrote to me from Rome of your visit here, and I went to your yacht to call this afternoon. My name is Pruccio—Signor Adriano Pruccio."

Lord Maurice bowed.

"I remember your father quite well," he said, "and I am glad to commence our acquaintance by accepting the favor you offer. Will you be so good as to make all the necessary arrangements with the Count Marioni's second, and let me know the result."

The Palermitan withdrew into a corner of the room with the Frenchman, and a few minutes' whispered conversation took place between them. Then he rejoined Lord St. Maurice, who was standing at the window.

"I am sorry to say that Count Marioni, who is the insulted person in this affair, chooses swords."

Lord St. Maurice nodded.

"When, and where?"

"At a place below the cliffs to which I shall conduct you at six o'clock to-morrow morning."

"At six o'clock! But he has another affair on at half-past."

"So I understand," the Palermitan answered, "I pointed out that we should prefer an interval of at least a day; but Monsieur le

Capitaine there explains that the Count de Marioni, having dispensed with his incognito, is hourly in danger of arrest on account of some political trouble, and is therefore anxious to have both affairs settled. I have agreed, therefore, with your permission, to waive all etiquette in the matter."

"I don't know that it makes any difference to me," Lord St. Maurice answered. "To-night, by moonlight, would have suited me best."

Signor Pruccio laughed.

"You are in a great hurry, Lord St. Maurice. May I ask whether you are proficient with your weapon?"

"I never fenced since I was at school," he answered coolly. "I suppose Marioni is dangerous?"

The Palermitan looked very grave. He began to see that it would be more like a murder than a duel.

"Count Marioni is one of the finest swordsmen in Italy," he answered. "Perhaps, if I were to explain that you are not accustomed to the rapier——"

"Pray don't," Lord St. Maurice interrupted. "He'd be just as likely to shoot me."

"That is true," Signor Pruccio assented. "I have seen him do wonderful things with the

pistol. If you can spare an hour or two, Signor, I should be happy to give you a little advice as to the management of your weapon. There is a large room at the top of my house where we fence."

Lord St. Maurice shook his head.

"Thank you, I'll take my chance," he answered.

"At five o'clock, Signor. Will you not come to my house for the night?"

"I'm much obliged, but I must write some letters. Good-night, Signor."

"Good-night, Signor. Sleep well!"

. . . . . .

The golden light died out of the waning moon, and afar off in the east a long line of red clouds seemed to rise out of the sea. The air was still and calm and breathless. Even the sea seemed hushed as the yellow stars faded from the sky. Behind that bank of glowing clouds was the promise of the richer and fuller day. Amber was becoming golden, and pink purple, till through a very rainbow of coloring the sun's first rays shot across the chilled waters.

Lord St. Maurice had fallen asleep, with his head resting upon his arms, close to the open window. By his side, with the ink scarcely dry upon either, were his will, and his farewell

letter to Adrienne. No one but himself would ever know the agony, the hopeless grief, which had rent his heart, as word after word, sentence after sentence of passionate leave-taking had found their way on to those closely-written sheets of paper. But it was over now—over and done with. When some faint sound from below, or a breath of the morning breeze from the bosom of the sea awoke him, and he commenced making a few preparations for the start, he was surprised to find how calm he was. The passion of his grief had spent itself. He thought of those hours before sleep had fallen upon him with horror, but they seemed to him very far away. He was face to face with death, but he felt only that he was about to make a journey into an undiscovered land. His imagination was dulled. He remembered only that he was going out to meet death, and it behoved him to meet it as an honorable English gentleman.

He plunged his head into a basin of cold water and made a careful toilette, not forgetting even the button-hole which Adrienne had fetched for him with her own fingers on the evening before. Then he quietly left the hotel, and walked slowly up and down the Marina until Signor Pruccio arrived.

CHAPTER X

A MARIONI'S OATH

Two men stood facing one another on a narrow belt of sand, stripped to the shirt, and with rapiers in their hands. One was the Sicilian, Leonardo di Marioni, the other the Englishman, Lord St. Maurice. Their attitude spoke for itself. They were about to fight for each other's life.

It was a fair spot which their two seconds had chosen to stain with bloodshed. Close almost to their feet, the blue waters of the Mediterranean, glistening in the early morning sunlight, broke in tiny, rippling waves upon the firm white sand. Inland was a semi-circle of steep cliffs, at the base of which there were great bowlders of rock, fern-covered and with hyacinths of many colors growing out of the crevices, and lending a sweet fragrance to the fresh morning air. It was a spot shut off from the world, for the towering cliffs ran out into the sea on either side, completely enclosing the little cove. There was only one possible approach to it, save by boat, and that a difficult and tedious one, and, looking upward from

the shore, hard to discover. But on the northward side the cliffs suddenly dropped, and in the cleft was a thick plantation of aloes, through which a winding path led down to the beach.

Perhaps of all the little group gathered down there to witness and take part in the coming tragedy, Signor Pruccio, Lord St. Maurice's second, was looking the most disturbed and anxious. His man, he knew, must fall, and an ugly sickening dread was in his heart. It was so like a murder. He pictured to himself that fair boyish face—and in the clear morning sunlight the young Englishman's face showed marvelously few signs of the night of agony through which he had passed—ghastly and livid, with the stamp of death upon the forehead, and the deep blue eyes glazed and dull. It was an awful thing, yet what could he do? What hope was there? Leonardo di Marioni he knew to be a famous swordsman; Lord St. Maurice had never fenced since he had left Eton, and scarcely remembered the positions. It was doubtful even whether he had ever held a rapier. But what Signor Pruccio feared most was the pale, unflinching hate in the Sicilian's white face. He loathed it, and yet it fascinated him. He knew, alas! how easily, by one swift turn of the wrist, he would be able

to pass his sword through the Englishman's body, mocking at his unskilled defense. He fancied that he could see the arms thrown up to heaven, the fixed, wild eyes, the red blood spurting out from the wound and staining the virgin earth; almost he fancied that he could hear the death-cry break from those agonized white lips. Horrible effort of the imagination! What evil chance had made him offer his services to this young English lord, and dragged him into assisting at a duel which could be but a farce—worse than a farce, a murder? He would have given half his fortune for an earthquake to have come and swallowed up that merciless Sicilian.

A few yards away Martin Briscoe was standing with his second. He and Lord St. Maurice, at this tragical moment of their lives, had been nearer a quarrel than ever before. Briscoe, with some justice, had claimed priority with the Sicilian, and had maintained his right in the face of Lord St. Maurice's opposition. But the Sicilian had stepped in, and insisted upon his privilege to decide for himself whom he should first meet. The times had been distinctly stated, he reminded them, six o'clock by Lord St. Maurice's second, and half-past six by Mr. Briscoe's. He had arranged it so with a definite purpose, and he claimed

that it should be carried out. There was no appeal from his decision. He was in the right, and Martin Briscoe, with a dull red glow of anger in his homely rugged cheeks, had been forced to retire and become a most unwilling spectator of what he feared could only be a butchery.

Signor Pruccio had delayed the duel as long as he could, under the pretext of waiting for the doctor who had been instructed to follow them, but who had not yet arrived. Twice the Sicilian had urged that they should commence, and each time he had pleaded that they might wait for a few minutes longer. To enter upon a duel *à l'outrance*, save in the presence of a medical man, was a thing unheard of, he declared. But at last this respite was exhausted, for the opposing second, with a pleasant smile, had remarked that he himself was skilled in surgery, and would be happy to officiate should any necessity arise. There was no longer any excuse. Lord St. Maurice himself insisted upon the signal being given. Sadly therefore he prepared to give it. Already both men had fallen into position. The word trembled upon his lips.

A flock of sea-birds flew screaming over their heads, and he waited a moment until they should have passed. Then he raised his hand.

"Stop!"

The cry was a woman's. They all looked round. Only a few yards away from them stood Adrienne, her fair hair streaming loose in the morning breeze, and her gown torn and soiled. She had just issued from the sloping aloe plantation, and was trembling in every limb from the speed of her descent.

The cloud on the Sicilian's face grew black as night.

"This is no sight for you to look upon!" he cried, between his teeth. "You will not save your lover by waiting. You had better go, or I will kill him before your eyes!"

She walked calmly between them, and looked from one to the other.

"Lord St. Maurice, I need not ask you, I know! This duel is not of your seeking?"

"It is not!" he answered, lowering his sword. "This fellow insulted me, and I punished him publicly in the restaurant of the Hotel de l'Europe last night. In my opinion, that squared matters, but he demanded satisfaction, and from his point of view, I suppose he has a right to it. I am quite ready to give it to him."

The seconds had fallen back. They three were alone. She went up to the Sicilian and laid her hand upon his arm.

"Leonardo, we have been friends, have we not? Why should you seek to do that which will make us enemies for ever? I have broken no faith with you; I never gave you one word of hope. I never loved you; I never could have loved you! Why should you seek to murder the man whom I do love, and make me miserable for ever?"

His face was ghastly, but he showed no sign of being moved by her words.

"Bah! You talk as you feel—just now!" he said quickly. "I tell you that I do not believe one word. If he had not come between us, you would have been mine some day. Love like mine would have conquered in the end. Away! away!" he cried, pushing her back in growing excitement, and stamping on the ground with his feet. "The sight of you only maddens me, and nerves my arm to kill! Though you beg on your knees for his life, that man shall die!"

"I shall not beg upon my knees," she answered proudly. "Yet, Leonardo, for your own sake, for the sake of your own happiness, I bid you once more consider. You would stain your hand with the blood of the man who is more to me than you can ever be. Is this what you call love? Leonardo, beware! I am not a woman to be lightly robbed of what is

dear to me. Put up your sword, or you will repent it to your dying day."

Her voice rang out clear and threatening upon the morning stillness, and her eyes were flashing with anger. It was a wonderful tableau which had grouped itself upon that little strip of sand.

The Sicilian was unmoved. The sight of the woman he loved championing his foe seemed to madden him.

"Out of my way!" he cried, grasping his sword firmly. "Lord St. Maurice, are you not weary of skulking behind a woman's petticoats? On guard! I say. On guard!"

She suddenly flung her hands above her head, and there was what seemed to be a miraculous increase in the little group. Three men in plain, dark clothes sprang from behind a gigantic bowlder, and, in an instant, the Sicilian was seized from behind.

He looked around at his captors, pale and furious. They were strangers to him. As yet, he did not realize what had happened.

"What does this mean?" he cried furiously. "Who dares to lay hands upon me? We are on free ground!"

She shook her head.

"Leonardo, you have brought this upon yourself," she said, firmly but compassionately.

"You plotted to murder the man I love. I warned you that, to protect him, there was nothing which I would not dare. Only a moment ago I gave you another chance. One word from you and I would have thrown these papers into the sea," producing a packet from her bosom, "rather than have placed them where I do now!"

A fourth man had strolled out of the aloe grove, smoking a long cigarette. Into his hands Adrienne had placed the little packet of letters, which he accepted with a low bow.

Even now the Sicilian felt bewildered; but as his eyes fell upon the fourth man he started and trembled violently, gazing at him as though fascinated.

"I do not understand!" he faltered.

The fourth man removed his cigarette from his teeth and produced a paper.

"Permit me to explain," he said politely. "I have here a warrant for your arrest, Count di Marioni, alias Leonardo di Cortegi, on two counts: first, that you, being an exile, have returned to Italian soil; and secondly, on a further and separate charge of conspiracy against the Italian Government, in collusion with a secret society, calling themselves 'Members of the Order of the White Hyacinth.' The proofs

of the latter conspiracy, which were wanting at your first trial, have now been furnished."

He touched the little roll of papers which he had just received, and, with a low bow, fell back. There was an ominous silence.

At the mention of his first name a deathlike pallor had swept in upon the Sicilian's face. His manner suddenly became quite quiet and free from excitement. But there was a look in his dark eyes more awful than had been his previous fury.

"You have done a brave thing indeed, Adrienne!" he said slowly. "You have saved your lover. You have betrayed the man who would have given his life to serve you. Listen to me! As I loved you before so do I hate you now! As my love for you in the past has governed my life, and brought me always to your side, so in the days to come shall my undying hate for you and for that man shape my actions and mold my life, and bring me over sea and land to the farthest corners of the earth to wreak my vengeance upon you. Be it ten, or twenty, or thirty years, they keep me rotting in their prisons, the time will come when I shall be free again; and then, beware! Search your memory for the legends of our race! Was ever a hate forgotten, or an oath broken? Hear me swear," he cried, raising his clasped

hands above his head with a sudden passionate gesture, "by the sun, and the sky, and the sea, and the earth, I swear that, as they continue unchanged and unchanging, so shall my hate for you remain! Ah! you can take your lover's hand, traitress, and think to find protection there. But in your heart I read your fear. The day shall come when you shall kneel at my feet for mercy, and there shall be no mercy. Gentlemen, my sword. I am at your service."

CHAPTER XI

A MEETING OF THE ORDER

A MAN in a fur-lined overcoat—thin, shrunken, and worn—stood on the pavement in a little street in Camberwell, looking about him in evident disgust. Before him stretched a long row of six-roomed houses, smoke-begrimed, hideously similar, hideously commonplace. The street was empty save for the four-wheeled cab from which he had just alighted, and which was now vanishing in a slight fog, a milkman and a greengrocer's boy in amicable converse, and a few dirty children playing in the gutter. Nothing could be more depressing, or more calculated to unfavorably impress a stranger from a southern land visiting the great city for the first time. It was a picture of suburban desolation, the home of poverty-stricken philistinism, uncaring and uncared for. In Swinburne's words, though with a different meaning, one saw there, without the necessity of further travel, " a land that was lonelier than ruin."

The little old man who had alighted from the cab, stood for a moment or two looking

helplessly around, half surprised at what he saw, half disgusted. Such monotonous and undeviating ugliness was a thing which he had never dreamed of—certainly he had never encountered anything like it. Was it possible that he had made a mistake in the address? He drew a scrap of paper from his pocket and consulted it again. The address was written there plainly enough—85, Eden Street, Camberwell. He was certainly in Eden Street, Camberwell, and the figures on the gate-post opposite him, worn and black with dirt, were unmistakably an eight and a five. With a little shudder he pushed open the gate, and walked through the narrow strip of untidy garden to the front door. The bell he found broken and useless, so he knocked softly at first, and then louder against the worn panels.

It was some time before an answer came. Several of the neighbors appeared upon their doorsteps, and took bold and somewhat ribald stock of the visitor. A young person of eighty-one, who was considered the wit of the neighborhood, made several very audible remarks, which produced a chorus of gigglings, on the subject of his clothes and foreign appearance. But he stood there as though he had been deaf, his hands thrust down into the loose pockets of his overcoat, and his deep-sunken eyes

fixed wistfully but not impatiently upon the closed door. He was a mute picture of resignation.

At last, after his third summons, the door was slowly and cautiously opened, and the astonished visitor beheld, for the first time in his life, a London maid-of-all-work. The astonishment seemed perfectly mutual. He, with his parchment dried face, white hair and eyebrows, and piercing black eyes only a little dimmed by time, muffled up to the throat in furs, and unmistakably a foreigner, was as strange to her as her appearance was to him. He looked at her black hands, her face besmeared with dirt, and with her uncombed hair hanging loose around it, at the tattered and soiled print gown looped up on one side and held together on the other by pins, and at the white-stockinged feet showing through the holes in her boots. What an object it was! It was fortunate for him that the twilight and fog concealed, partially at any rate, the disgust in his face.

"Is—Mr. Bartlezzi in?" he inquired, as soon as he could find words to speak at all.

"Lawk-a-mussy! I dunno," the girl answered in blank bewilderment. "He don't have no visitors, he don't. You ain't taxes, are you?"

"No!" he answered, somewhat at a venture, for he did not catch her meaning.

"Nor water rate? No, you ain't the water rate," she continued, meditatively. "I knows him. He wears a brown billycock and glasses, 'e does, and I see him walking with Mary Ann Stubbins on a Sunday."

He admitted doubtfully that she was correct. He was not the water rate.

It began to dawn upon her that it would be safe to admit him into the house.

"Just yer come hinside, will yer," she said. "I dunno who yer are, but I guess you ain't nothink to be afraid of. Come hinside."

She opened the door and admitted him into a dark, narrow passage. He had to squeeze himself against the wall to allow her to pass him. Then she surveyed him critically again, with her arms akimbo and her head a little on one side.

"I reckon you've got a name," she surmised. "What is it?"

"You can tell Mr. Bartlezzi that a gentleman from abroad desires to speak with him," he answered. "My name is immaterial. Will you accept this?" he added, holding out a half-crown timidly toward her.

She grabbed it from him, and turned it over incredulously in the semi-darkness. There was

no deception about it; it was indeed a half-crown—the first she had ever been given in her life.

She dropped a rude sort of curtsey, and, opening the door of a room, half ushered, half pushed him in. Then she went to the foot of the stairs, the coin tightly clinched in her hand, and he heard her call out——

"Master! There's a gent here from furrin parts has wants you, which 'is name his immaterial. 'E's in the parlor."

There was a growl in reply, and then silence. The handmaiden, her duty discharged, shuffled off to the lower regions. The visitor was left alone.

He looked around him in deep and increasing disgust. The walls of the little room into which he had been shown were bare, save for a few cheap chromos and glaring oleographs of the sort distributed by grocers and petty tradespeople at Christmas. A cracked looking-glass, with a dirty gilt frame, tottered upon the mantelpiece. The furniture was scanty, and of the public-house pattern, and there was a strong nauseous odor of stale tobacco smoke and beer. A small piano stood in one corner, the cheapest of its kind, and maintaining an upright position only by means of numerous props. One leg tilted in the air was supported

by two old and coverless volumes of a novel, and another was casterless. The carpet was worn into shreds, and there was no attempt to conceal or mend the huge ravages which time had made in it. The ceiling was cracked and black with smoke, and the faded paper was hanging down from the top of the wall. There was not a single article or spot in the room on which the eye could rest with pleasure. It was an interior which matched the exterior. Nothing worse could be said about it.

The visitor took it all in, and raising his hand to his head closed his eyes. Ah! what a relief it was to blot it all out of sight, if only for a moment. He had known evil times, but at their worst, such surroundings as these he had never met with. A strange nervousness was creeping slowly over him, the presage of disappointment. He dropped his hands, and walked restlessly up and down, striving to banish his fears. Might not all this be necessary —a form of disguise—a clever mode of concealment? Poverty alone could not have brought things to this strait. Poverty! There had been no poverty in his day. Yet he was full of forebodings. He remembered the wonder, the evasions, almost the pity with which his first inquiries in Rome had been met. He could not expect to find things exactly the

same. Twenty years is a long time, and there must be many changes. Why had he not stayed in Rome a little longer, and learned more. He could easily have obtained the knowledge which he desired there. It would have been wiser, surely it would have been wiser.

The door opened in the midst of his meditations, and he looked eagerly up. Again his heart fell. It was not such a man as this that he had expected to see. Ah! what a day of disappointments it was!

The figure which, after a moment's pause in the doorway, now advanced somewhat hesitatingly toward him, was that of a man a little past middle age. He was of medium height, but stout even to corpulency, and his cheeks were fat and puffy. His hair was gray, and his thick, stubbly mustaches, which had evidently once been black, were also changing color. His dark, shiny coat was ridiculously short for him, and his trousers terminated above his ankles. He wore no necktie, and his collar was ragged and soiled. In short, his whole appearance was not only untidy but dirty. His gait, too, was slouching and undignified.

"You wished to speak to me," he said in a thick tone and with a foreign accent. "My

name is Bartlezzi—Signor Alfonso Bartlezzi."

"Yes, I wished to speak with you."

Signor Bartlezzi began to feel uncomfortable under his visitor's fixed gaze. Why should he look at him so intently? He had never set eyes upon him before—and what an odd, shrunken little figure it was. He coughed and shifted his position.

"Ah! yes. I am ready, as you see. Is it anything to do with my profession?"

"I do not know what your profession is."

Signor Bartlezzi made an effort to draw himself up, and assumed a military air.

"I am a master of fencing," he announced, "also a professor of Italian—Professor Alfonso Bartlezzi, at your service. I am fairly well-known in this neighborhood. If you have pupils to recommend, sir, or if you are thinking of taking lessons yourself, I should be most happy. My services are sometimes made use of as interpreter, both in the police court and privately. I should be happy to serve you in that capacity, sir."

Signor Bartlezzi, having declared himself, folded his arms and waited. He felt certain that his visitor must now divulge his name and mission. That, however, he seemed in no hurry to do.

"You are an Italian?" he asked presently.

"Certainly, sir."

"May I ask, have you still correspondents or friends in that country?"

The Professor was a little uneasy. He looked steadfastly at his visitor for a moment, however, and seemed to regain his composure.

"I have neither," he answered sorrowfully. "The friends of former days are silent; they have forgotten me."

"You have lived in England for long, then?"

"Since I was a boy, sir."

"And you are content?"

The Professor shrugged his shoulders and looked round. The gesture was significant.

"Scarcely so," he answered. "But what would you have? May I now ask you a question, sir?" he continued.

"Yes."

"Your name?"

His visitor looked around him mournfully.

"The day for secrecy is past, I suppose," he said sadly. "I am the Count Leonardo di Marioni."

"What!" shrieked the Professor.

"Count Leonardo di Marioni—that is my name. I am better known as Signor di Cortegi, perhaps, in the history of our society."

"My God!"

If a thunderbolt had burst through the ceiling of the little sitting room, the Professor could not have been more agitated. He had sunk down upon a chair, pale and shaking all over with the effect of the surprise.

"He was a young man?" he faltered.

His visitor sighed.

"It was five-and-twenty years ago," he answered slowly. "Five-and-twenty years rotting in a Roman prison. That has been my fate. I was a young man then. You see me now."

He held up his arms, and let them drop again heavily to his side. It was a gesture full of sad dramatic pathos, but in that little room there was no one to observe it, no one to pity him for those white hairs and deep-drawn lines. But that was nothing. It was not pity that he wanted.

There was silence. Both men were absorbed in their own thoughts. Signor Bartlezzi was thunderstruck and completely unnerved. The perspiration stood out upon his forehead, and he could feel his hands and legs shaking. This was a terrible and altogether unexpected blow to him. It was not the thought of that twenty-five years' lonely captivity which was oppressing him, so much as the fact that it was over —that the day of release had come, and that

it was indeed Count Marioni who stood before him, alive and a free man. That was the serious part of it. Had it not been proclaimed that the imprisonment was for life? That had certainly been the sentence. A gleam of hope flashed in upon him. Perhaps he had escaped from prison. If so, the sooner he was back there the better.

"Was not the sentence for life?" he gasped.

The Count assented, shaking his head slowly.

"Yes, for life," he answered bitterly. "That was the sentence, imprisonment for life."

"Then you have escaped?"

The same slow shake of the head. The Professor was bitterly disappointed.

"No. At five-and-twenty years a prisoner with a good-conduct sheet is restored to liberty. My time came at last. It was a weary while."

"What evil fate kept him alive all that time?" the Professor muttered under his breath. "Men are buried deep who pass within the walls of an Italian prison. What had kept this frail old man alive?" Before the night was over, he knew!

The Professor sat on the edge of his chair, limp and dejected. He was quite powerless to frame any speech of welcome or congratulation. Fortunately, it was not expected. His

visitor was deep in thought, and some time passed before he appeared even to notice the presence of Signor Bartlezzi. At last, however, he looked up and spoke.

"I fear that all things have not gone well with us!" he said sadly. "On my release, I visited the old home of our society in the Piazza di Spiola at Rome. It was broken up. I met with no one who could tell me anything about it. It was doubtless because I knew not where to go; but I had fancied—I had hoped—that there might have been some one whose memory would not have been altogether dulled by time, who would have come to meet me at the prison gates, and welcome me back into the living world once more. But that is nothing. Doubtless the day of my release was unknown. It was the hot season at Rome, and I wandered wearily about, seeing no familiar face, and unable to hear anything of our friends. I might have had patience and lingered, but it seemed to me that I had been patient so long—it was all exhausted. From there I went to Florence, with the same result. At last I came to London, and by making cautious inquiries through my bank, I discovered your address. So I have come here."

"Ah, yes, yes," answered the Professor, with blinking eyes, and still completely bewil-

dered. "You have come here. Just so. Just so."

"The numbers have fallen off, I suppose? Yet you still have meetings?"

"Oh, yes; certainly. We still have meetings," the Professor assented spasmodically.

The little old man nodded his head gravely. He had never doubted it.

"When is the next?" he asked, with the first touch of eagerness creeping into his voice.

Signor Bartlezzi felt a cold perspiration on his forehead, and slowly mopped it with a red cotton handkerchief. The calmness of despair was settling down upon him. "He must know," he thought. "Better get it over."

"To-night," he answered, "in an hour—perhaps before. They'll be dropping in directly."

"Ah!" It was a long-drawn and significant monosyllable. The Count rose to his feet, and commenced pacing the room. Already its meanness was forgotten, its narrow walls had expanded. The day of his desire had come. "What are your numbers now?" he asked.

The Professor drew a long breath, and kept his eyes fixed upon his visitor. The thing was narrowing down.

"Four," he answered; "four besides myself."

The Count started and appeared perplexed.

"Four on the acting committee, you mean, I suppose?" he suggested. "Four is the old number."

The Professor shook his head doggedly.

"Four altogether," he repeated.

The old man's eyes flashed, but the angry light died almost immediately away. After all, there might be grave reasons, of which he was ignorant, for restricting the number.

"Four desperate and brave men may be much," he mused, half aloud. "One will do enough for my purpose."

There was a ghastly humor in that speech which was nearly too much for Signor Bartlezzi. He was within an ace of collapsing, but he saved himself by a quick glance at that worn old man. His visitor was living in the light of five-and-twenty years ago. The awakening would come. It was at hand.

"Signor Bartlezzi," the Count said, pausing suddenly in his restless walk, "I have a confession to make."

"So had he," Signor Bartlezzi mused, though his would keep.

"Proceed," he begged, with a wave of his hand and a touch of his old bombast, which had collapsed so suddenly. "Proceed, I am all attention."

The Count stood in the middle of the room, with his left hand thrust into the bosom of his coat, and the right stretched out toward the Professor. It was his old attitude of bygone days into which he had unconsciously fallen, but his expression was no longer threatening, and his voice, though indeed it quivered, was free from the passion and fire of his youth. He was apologetic now, rather than denunciatory. It was a great change.

"You will doubtless imagine, Signor Bartlezzi," he said, "from my presence here, from my seeking you out immediately upon my release, that the old fires burn still in my heart; that my enthusiasm for the cause still survives the chill of five-and-twenty years. Alas! that I should confess it, but it is not so!"

"Then what the mischief does he want here?" mused the Professor. "An account of his money, I suppose. Oh, damn those meddlesome Italians who set him free."

"I am sorry, but it is natural," he remarked aloud, wagging his head sagely. "Five-and-twenty years is a devil of a time!"

"You will not misunderstand me, Professor," he went on almost pleadingly. "You will not imagine for one moment that the 'Order of the White Hyacinth' and everything connected with it, is not still dear to me, very dear.

I am an old man, and my time for usefulness is past. Yet there is one demand which I have to make of the association which I have faithfully served and suffered for. Doubtless you know full well what I mean. Will you hear it now, or shall I wait and lay it before the meeting to-night?"

"The latter, by all means," begged the Professor hastily. "They wouldn't like it if you told me first. They'd feel hurt, I'm sure."

The Count bowed his head.

"So be it, then," he said gravely.

There was a short silence. The Professor, with his thumbs in his waistcoat, gazed fixedly down the street.

"I don't see why they shouldn't share the storm," he mused. "He's small, but he looks as though he might be awkward. I would very much rather Martello and the others were here; Martello is a strong man."

There was a knock at the outside door, and Signor Bartlezzi peered through the window.

"There they are!" he exclaimed. "I'll go and let them in myself. It would be better to prepare them for your presence. Excuse me."

His visitor bowed, and resumed his seat.

"I await the pleasure of the Council," he said with dignity.

CHAPTER XII

"A FIGURE FROM A WORLD GONE BY"

THE Count was left to himself in the bare, untidy-looking parlor, and for a minute or two he was content to sit quite still and recover himself after the unaccustomed exertion of speech. He needed all his strength for what lay before him, but, by degrees, his restlessness grew. He rose from his chair and paced up and down in increasing excitement—his misgivings were growing fainter—he worked himself up into the firm belief that the day for which he had waited so long was at hand.

"They dare not deny me!" he cried, lifting his hands high above his head until they almost touched the smoke-begrimed ceiling; "it is my due, my just reward!"

He was so absorbed that he did not hear the noises outside—the shuffling of feet, and, after a while, a brief suppressed tittering. Signor Bartlezzi, who had entered the room quietly, had to speak twice before he was conscious of his presence.

"They are in the room behind, Signor

Count, and I have informed them of your presence," he announced.

The Count drew himself up, and stopped suddenly short in his restless walk.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Lead the way! I follow."

Together they passed into the narrow passage, and the Professor threw open the door of another room. The Count entered.

The Professor had done what he could in the short time at his disposal. Pens and ink had been placed upon the deal table, and the chairs had been ranged along it instead of around the fire. The tobacco jar and pipes were there, however, and some suspicious-looking jugs; and the hasty current of fresh air, caused by the withdrawal of a sheet of brown paper from the upper window frame, was altogether powerless to cope with the close beer-house smell which hung about the place.

The company consisted of four men. The chair at the head of the table had been left vacant for the Professor. On the right sat Andrew Martello, an anglicized Italian, and a vendor of ice cream; on the left was Pietro Muratti, the proprietor of an itinerant musical instrument. These were the only two, besides the Professor, who had any pretense to Italian

blood. The other two were a French barber and a Jew pawnbroker.

The light was purposely dim, and the Count's eyes were bad. Besides, his long confinement, and the great though suppressed excitement under which he was laboring, had to a certain extent confused his judgment. He saw a mean room, and four men only, when he had dreamed of a chamber in some great house and an important assemblage; but, disappointing though this was, it did not seem fatal to his hopes. Let but these four men be faithful to their oaths, and he, who had served their cause so well, could demand as a right the boon he craved. He strove earnestly to read their faces, but the light was bad and his eyes were dim. He must wait. Their voices would show him what manner of men they were. After all, why should he doubt for a moment? Men who had remained faithful to a dying and deserted cause, must needs be men of strength and honorable men. The very fewness of their numbers proved it, else why should they too not have fallen away. He would banish all doubt. He would speak when his time came with all confidence.

The Professor introduced him with all solemnity, casting an appealing glance at each in turn, as though begging them to accept this

matter seriously. There was just a slender thread of hope still, and he did not intend to abandon it.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I have the honor to present to you the Count Leonardo di Marioni, a martyr, as you all know, to our cause. Count Marioni was, only last week, released from an imprisonment which has lasted for five-and-twenty years."

They all looked at him curiously—a little compassionately, but none of them were quite sure how to acknowledge the salutation. The Jew alone stood up and made a shuffling little bow; the others remained silent except the little French barber, who murmured something about pleasure and acquaintance, which the Professor promptly frowned down. The Count, who had remained standing, advanced to the bottom of the table, and, laying his trembling hands upon it, spoke:

"Gentlemen and Brothers of the Order of the White Hyacinth," he said solemnly, "I am glad to meet you."

The Frenchman and the Italian Muratti exchanged expressive winks. The vendor of ice cream growled across the table for the bird's-eye, and commenced leisurely filling his pipe, while the Jew ventured upon a feeble "hear, hear."

"My name is doubtless known to you," the Count continued, "and the story of my life, which, I am proud to remember, is closely interwoven with the history of your Order. Your faces, alas! are strange to me. My old comrades, whom I had hoped to meet, and whose sympathy I had counted on, are no more. I feel somewhat as though I had stepped out of the shadows of a bygone life, and everything is a little strange to me. I have grown unaccustomed even to speech itself. You must pardon me if I do not make myself understood with ease. The past seems very, very far away.

By this time all the pipes were lit, and the mugs were filled. The smoke hung round the little assembly in a faint cloud, and the atmosphere was growing dense. The Count looked a little puzzled, but he only hesitated for a moment. He remembered that he was in England, and the habits of foreigners were not easy to grow accustomed to. It was a small matter, although he wished that the odor of the tobacco had not been quite so rank. When he resumed speaking, however, it was forgotten in a moment.

"I must ask you to bear with me in a certain confession which I am about to make," he continued. "I am not here to-night to inquire or in any way to concern myself in the political

prospects of our Order. Alas! that the time should come when I should find myself calmly acknowledging that my country's sorrows were mine no longer. But, comrades, I must claim from you your generous consideration. Five-and-twenty years is a long time. I have lost my touch of history. My memory—I must confess it—my memory itself is weak. I do not doubt that, small though your numbers be, you are nobly carrying on the work in which I, too, once bore a part. I do not doubt but that you are laboring still in the glorious cause of liberty. But I am with you no longer; my work on earth for others, such as it has been, is accomplished. I do not come to aid or to join you. Alas! that I should say it, I, Leonardo di Marioni, whose life was once so closely bound up with your prosperity as the breath of a man is to his body. But it is so. I am stranded upon the wreck of my past, and I can only call upon you with a far-distant voice for my own salvation."

There was a distinct air of relief. The vendor of ice cream spat upon the floor, and, in response to a frown from the Professor, at once covered it with his foot. The Professor drew his hand thoughtfully down his chin. They were approaching the *crux* of the whole matter.

"We regret it deeply, Count," he said solemnly. "In that case the small trifle of money which the London agents of your bank have placed to our credit yearly on your behalf for the cause, and which has regularly been used for the—er—necessary expenses—er——"

The Count stretched out his hand.

"It is nothing," he answered. "Why should you mention it? That and more, too, the Order is welcome to. I doubt not that it has been well used."

"It has!" they cried, with one voice.

"A drop more beer, and a bottle of bran——"

The ice vendor never finished his sentence. A furious kick from the Professor, under the table, reminded him that he was on dangerous grounds, and he desisted, rubbing his leg and growling.

The Count scarcely heeded the interruption. His whole form was shaking with eagerness; his bony, white hands were outstretched toward his four listeners. For five-and-twenty years he had dreamed of this.

"No, my appearance once more before you, comrades, brothers, has no such petty object!" he cried. "I am here to demand my rights as a member of the Order of the White Hyacinth. I am here to remind you of our great

principle—vengeance upon traitors! I am here to remind you of your unchanging oaths, and to claim your fulfillment of them, even as Francesco Dellia pleaded, and not in vain, before the council at Rome thirty years ago. We are a society of peace, save alone where traitors are concerned. I point out to you a traitor, and I cry—punishment!"

The Professor knitted his brows, and his hopes suddenly fell. They all exchanged glances.

"Old buffer's dotty," whispered the Jew to his neighbor, tapping his head significantly.

The musical gentleman nodded.

"Let's hear what it's all about, anyhow," muttered the ice-cream vendor, tapping the table.

There was silence at once. They all turned toward the Count, and waited.

He had not been disappointed in their silence. It seemed to him like the prudent reserve of true conspirators. They wished to hear his case, and, as yet, he had only reached the preamble. Good! they should hear it.

"You all know that I was arrested and thrown into prison because I broke what they choose to call my parole—because, after the sentence of banishment had been passed upon me, I returned to my native country, and took

part once more in the counsels of our Order. But you have yet to learn this, comrades; you have yet to learn that I was betrayed, foully, wilfully—betrayed into the clutches of the Italian police. Before my very eyes papers of our society incriminating me were placed in the hand of our enemy, Signor Villesco, by one who had sworn our oaths in the first degree and worn our flower. At your hands I call for vengeance upon my betrayers—vengeance upon Adrienne di Cartuccio, calling herself Lady St. Maurice, vengeance upon her husband, her family, and all belonging to her. It is the first decree of our Order, which all of you have sworn to, and I stand within my rights. Answer, comrades of the Order of the White Hyacinth! For your sake I have languished five-and-twenty years in a Roman prison. With you it rests to sweeten my death. By your oaths, I charge you, give me vengeance!"

His eyes were flashing, and his features, for the first time, were convulsed with anxiety. What meant this unsympathetic silence, this lack of enthusiasm? He looked from one to another of their stolid, puzzled faces. Where were the outstretched hands, the deep solemn oaths, the cry for lots to be drawn, which he had confidently expected? Their silence was

driving him mad. Suddenly the ice-cream vendor spoke.

"What is it you want, gaffer?" he asked, without removing his pipe from his mouth. "Cursed if I can see what you're driving at, or any of us, for that matter."

"What is it I want?" he cried passionately. "The life of my betrayer, or such a mark of my vengeance as will make her rue the day she sent one of your Order to work out his life, a miserable captive, in a prison cell. Is it not clear what I want? Speak, all of you! Do you grudge me this thing? Do you hesitate?"

The vendor of ice cream constituted himself the spokesman of the little party. He knocked the dead ashes from his pipe, and leisurely refilled it. The little old man at the bottom of the table was shaking with anxiety. The thunderbolt quivered in the air.

"That's all bally rot, you know, guv'nor," he said calmly. "We ain't murderers here! This White Hyacinth crew as you're a-talking of must a been a bloodthirsty lot o' chaps. We ain't on that track. We meets here just for a drop and a smoke, sociable like, with our friend the Professor, and forms a sort of a club like among hourselves. You've come to the wrong shop!"

The man's words, blunt and unfeeling, an-

swered their purpose well. They left no possibility of doubt or misunderstanding. The Count, after a moment's wild stare around, tottered, and sank into a chair. All that had seemed strange to him was suddenly clear. His head fell upon his arms, and he crouched there motionless. The hopes of five-and-twenty years were wrecked. The spark which had left him alive had died out! The Order of the White Hyacinth was no more!

There was a distinct and terrible pathos in the scene. Even those rough, coarse men, casting uneasy glances at that white, bowed head and crouching figure at the head of the table, and listening to his low moaning, were conscious of a vague pity. They thought of him as of some wandering lunatic who had strayed in upon them; and, indeed, none of them, except the Professor, doubted but that he was mad.

He looked up at last, and the ice-cream vendor, who was not a bad sort at heart, poured out a mugful of the unwholesome-looking beer, and pushed it across the table toward him.

"Here, guv'nor, drink this," he said gruffly; "it'll do you good. Cheer up, old buck! I should. What's done can't be undone, and what's dead can't be brought to life again. Make the best of it, I say. You've got some of

the ready left, I'll go bail, and you ain't too old to get a bit out o' life yet—if yer make haste. And about that bloodthirsty talk of yours, about vengeance and such like, you just take my tip and chuck it. We think more of life here than they does in furrin parts, and hangin' ain't a pleasant death. Take my tip, guv'nor, you chuck it!"

The Count pushed the mug away, and rose to his feet. He had not heard a word. There was a terrible buzzing in his head and ears.

"I am a foolish old man, I fear," he said unsteadily. "I ought to have considered. Five-and-twenty-years! Ah, yes, it is a long time ago. Professor, will you send your servant for a carriage? I will go away."

He stood quite still, talking softly to himself, with the tips of his fingers still resting lightly upon the table, and a far-away look in his eyes. Signor Bartlezzi himself ran hatless to the nearest cabstand, and in a few minutes the rattle of a vehicle was heard outside, and the Professor returned breathless. The Count rose at once.

"I wish you good-night, gentlemen," he said mildly. "You have been very patient with me. Five-and-twenty years! It is a long while—a long while! Five-and-twenty years!

Good-evening, gentlemen. Professor, I will take your arm to the door. My sight is a—little dim. Thank you. How dark it is. The Hotel Continental, if you please. Thank you, Professor."

And so he went away.

CHAPTER XIII

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH

For three days Count Leonardo di Marioni abode in his sitting-room at the Hotel Continental, living the life of a man in a dream. So far as the outside world was concerned, it was a complete case of suspended animation. Of all that passed around him he was only dimly conscious. The faces of his fellow creatures were strange to him. He had lost touch with the world, and the light of his reason was flickering; almost it seemed as though it would go out indeed, and leave him groping in the chaos of insanity. Mechanically he rose late in the morning, ate what was brought to him, or ordered what was suggested. All day long he sat in a sort of dreamless apathy, living still the life of the last five-and-twenty years, and finding no change, save that the chair in which he sat was softer, and the fire over which he stretched his withered palms was a new experience to him. There were things even which he missed in the freedom—if freedom

it could be called. He missed the warm dancing sunlight which, day by day, had filled the shabby sitting-room of his confinement. He missed that patch of deep blue sky seen through his high, barred window, and the fragrant scents of the outside world which, day by day, had floated through it. He missed the kindly greeting of his pitying gaoler, and the simple food—the macaroni, the black coffee, and the fruit—which had been served to him; and above all, there was something else which he missed.

For through all his apathy he was conscious of a great sickening disappointment, something gone out of his life which had helped him, day by day, through all that weary imprisonment. Dear to his heart had grown that hope of standing one day before the masters of his Order, and claiming, as his rightful due, vengeance upon those whose word had sent him into captivity. Dear to his memory and treasured among his thoughts had grown that hope. In his prison house he had grown narrower; other thoughts and purposes had faded away. That one only remained, growing stronger and stronger day by day, until it had seized hold of his whole being. He lived only through it and with it.

Given some soul-absorbing purpose, some

cherished end, however dimly seen through the mists of futurity, and a man may preserve his reason through the longest captivity; while, day by day, his narrowing life contracts till all conscience, all hope, all sentiment, become the slaves of that one passionate desire. Day by day, it looms larger before him; day by day, all doubts concerning it grow weaker, and the justice of it becomes clearer and more unquestioned. Right and wrong, justice and injustice, according to other men's standards, have no power over it in his own thoughts. His moral sense slumbers. So deeply has it become grafted into his life, that he no more questions its right to exist than he does the presence of the limbs upon his body. As surely as the night follows day, so surely does his whole being gravitate toward the accomplishment of his desire. It is a part of what is left of his life, and if it is smitten, his life is smitten. They are at once sympathetic and identical, so closely entwined that to sever them is death to both.

Thus it was with Count Marioni, and thus it was that, day by day, he sat in his sitting-room slowly pining to death. Rude feet had trampled upon the desire of his life, and the wound was open and bleeding. Only a little while longer and he would have turned upon

his side with a sigh, and yielded up his last breath; and, so far as his numbed faculties could have conceived a thought, death would have seemed very pleasant to him. He was dying of loneliness, of disappointment and despair.

The people at the hotel had made several attempts to rouse him, but in vain. He answered no questions, and in his quiet way resented intrusion. He paid whatever was demanded, and he gave no trouble. The manager, who knew his history from a short cutting in a newspaper which had chronicled his arrival in London, was at his wits' end to know how to save him. He had once endeavored to reason gently with his eccentric visitor, and he had been bidden quietly to leave the room. On his endeavoring to make one more appeal, the Count had risen quietly and pointed to the door.

"I wish only to be left in peace," he said, with a touch of dignity in his sad, calm manner. "If you cannot do that I will go away to another hotel. Choose!"

The manager had bowed and withdrawn in silence. But he was a kind-hearted man, and he was still troubled about the matter. Day by day the Count was growing weaker; before long he would doubtless die from sheer

distaste of living as much as from any actual disease. Something ought to be done toward communicating with his friends, if he had any. With a certain amount of reluctance, the manager, as a last resource, penned the following advertisement and sent it to the principal London papers:

"If there are any friends or relatives still alive of Count Leonardo di Marioni, who has recently been set free by the Italian Government after a long term of imprisonment, they are requested to communicate, personally, if possible, with the manager of the Hotel Continental, where the Count is now lying dangerously ill."

CHAPTER XIV

AN EVERLASTING HATE

At four o'clock on the afternoon of the following day, an open barouche, drawn by a pair of magnificent bay horses, drove up to the door of the Hotel Continental. The manager, who was standing at the window of his private room, noticed two things—first, that there was a coronet upon the carriage door; and secondly, that the lady who was alighting carried in her hand a copy of the *Morning Post* turned down, as though to mark a certain place in it.

As she crossed the pavement he had a better view of her face, and recognized her with a little start of surprise. In a moment he was outside, and on the steps to receive her, an attention he very rarely bestowed upon his guests.

The swing doors opened and closed, and the lady, with the paper still in her hand, turned to the manager.

"Do you know anything about this paragraph?" she asked, touching it with her deli-

cately-gloved forefinger. "The one, I mean, which concerns the Count di Marioni?"

"Certainly, your ladyship." he answered. "I inserted it myself."

"He is still here, I suppose?"

"He is, your ladyship. I do not know whether you will consider that I acted wisely in taking such a step, but I could see no alternative. He arrived here alone about a fortnight ago, and at that time there seemed to be nothing singular about him excepting his clothing, and a certain nervousness which the servants marked in his manner, and which we can scarcely wonder at, considering his painful history and recent return to—er—civilized ways. He left the hotel almost immediately after engaging his room, and was away, I believe, for several hours. I chanced to be in the hall on his return, and was struck by the change in his appearance. Your ladyship, I never saw a man on whose face was written such dumb and helpless agony. He went straight to his room, and since then has never left it. He is simply pining to death there. He neither eats, nor drinks, nor speaks. He sits there, with his eyes fixed upon the fire, like a man waiting for his end. I ventured to visit him one morning, but my attempts at remonstrance were cut short at once in a most

dignified fashion. I feel that it would be heartless to ask him to leave the hotel; but, at the same time, if he remains, and continues in the same way, he will certainly either die or go mad very shortly. What he wants is the personal care of friends, and very kind treatment; and as I could think of no other way of communication with them, I decided to advertise his presence here. I trust that your ladyship does not think my interference officious?"

He bowed his head, and turned away out of respect for the tears which he could see in her eyes, and which she made scarcely an effort to conceal.

"No; you did quite right," she said after a moment's pause. "I was waiting for my husband outside the club, and quite by chance I took up the *Post* and saw your paragraph. I drove here at once. Will you show me to the Count's rooms, if you please?"

"Certainly, your ladyship. Will you come this way?"

She followed him up the fine marble staircase and down the first-floor corridor. At the extreme end he paused outside a door.

"It is of no use knocking," he said; "he never answers. If I can be of any further service, your ladyship will perhaps be so good as to ring the bell."

He opened the door for her, and closed it quietly as she entered. Then he retreated along the corridor, and returned to his room, wondering not a little at the visitor whom his advertisement had brought.

The great room in which the Count Marioni was sitting was almost in darkness, for the afternoon was dull and foggy, and the curtains were partially closed. There was no lamp lit, and the only light came from the brightly-burning fire near which the Count was sitting in an armchair ludicrously too large for his frail body. The flames fell upon his white, worn face, with its deep branding lines, and gleamed in his great sad eyes, so bright and dry that they seemed like mirrors for the firelight. His hair and short unkempt beard were as white as snow, matching even the unnatural pallor of his skin, and his black frock coat was buttoned across a chest which would have been narrow for a consumptive boy. He did, indeed, look on the threshold of death.

He had not turned his head at the opening or closing of the door, but presently another sound broke the silence. It was a woman's sob, and as he slowly turned his head, a tall, graceful figure moved forward out of the shadows, and he heard his name softly murmured.

"Leonardo!"

His hand went up to his forehead. Was it a dream; or was he indeed back once more in the days of his youth, back among the pine woods which topped his castle, walking side by side with her whose presence seemed to make the long summer days one sweet dream of delight? The familiar odor of violets and wild hyacinths seemed to fill the room. The fog-bound city, with its ceaseless roar, existed for him no longer. The sun of his own dear country warmed his heart, and the sea wind blew in his eager face. And she was there—his queen—the great desire of his weary life. All his pulses leaped with the joy of her presence. Five-and-twenty years of lonely misery were blotted out. Ah! memory is a wonderful magician!

"Leonardo! Will you not speak to me?"

Again that voice! Where was he now? Face to face with her on the sands at Palermo, deceived, betrayed, given over to the enemies of his country, and by her—the woman for whom his passionate love had been his sole crime. Listen! The air is full of that cry of threatened vengeance. Hark how the echoes ring back from the cliffs. "By the sun, and the sky, and the sea, and the earth, I swear that, as they continue unchanged and unchanging, so

shall my hate for you remain!" Darkness—a prison cell. Year by year, year by year, darkness, solitude, misery! See the black hair turn gray, the strength of manhood wasting away, the eye growing dim, the body weak. Year by year, year by year, it goes on. What was that scratched upon the whitewashed walls? What was the cry which rang back from the towering cliff! "Hate unchanging and unchanged!" The same—ever the same.

"Leonardo, have you no word for me?"

He rose slowly from his chair, and fixed his eyes upon her.

Before their fire she shrank back, appalled. Was it a storm about to burst upon her? No! The words were slow and few.

"You have dared to come—here; dared to come and look upon your handiwork! Away! Out of my sight! You have seen me. Go!"

Tears blinded her eyes. The sight of him was horrible to her. She forgot, in her great pity, that justice had been upon her side. She sank upon her knees before him on the velvet pile carpet.

"Leonardo, for the love of God, forgive me!" she sobbed. "Oh! it is painful to see you thus, and to know the burden of hate which you carry in your heart. Forgive me! Forgive us both!"

He stooped down until his ghastly face nearly touched hers.

"Curse you!" he muttered hoarsely. "You dare to look at me, and ask for forgiveness. Never! never! Every morning and night I curse you. I curse you when my mother taught me to pray. I live for nothing else. If I had the strength I would strangle you where you stand. Hell's curses and mine ring in your ears and sit in your heart day by day and night by night! Away with you! Away, away!"

She was a brave woman, but she fled from the room like a hunted animal, and passed out of the hotel with never a look to the right or to the left.

The manager came out to speak to her, but he stood still, aghast, and let her go without uttering a word or offering to assist her. As long as he lived he remembered the look on the Countess of St. Maurice's face as she came down those stairs, clutching hold of the banisters, and, with hasty trembling steps, left the hotel. He was a great reader of fiction, and he had heard of Irish banshees and Brahmin ghosts; but never a living story-teller had painted such a face as he looked upon at that moment.

CHAPTER XV

THE COUNT'S SECOND VISITOR

Two days more passed without any change in the Count's conduct or health, save that his brow was a little darker, and he was heard occasionally muttering to himself.

On the morning of the third, a four-wheeled cab deposited at the door of the hotel a young lady, who demanded somewhat haughtily to see the manager. She was shown into the waiting-room, and in a few minutes he appeared.

He had been expecting a visit from an applicant for the post of assistant bookkeeper, and he entered the room with a little less than his usual ceremony, under the impression that this was she. He found himself confronted with a tall, slim girl, elegantly but simply dressed in plain black clothes. She carried herself with the dignity of a queen, and before the quick glance of her flashing black eyes he felt himself abashed into making a low bow. There was something foreign in her appearance, but something eminently aristocratic.

"Good-morning, madam."

She disdained to notice the salutation, and, holding out a paper toward him, pointed with her long slim finger to the advertisement column.

"I have come about this paragraph. Take me to him!"

"With the greatest pleasure, madam," he answered, bowing. "May I be permitted to ask, are you a relation of the Count's?"

"Certainly, I am his niece," she answered, frowning. "Take me to him at once. I don't choose to be kept waiting," she added impetuously.

The manager bit his lip, and bowed again to hide a smile. It seemed to him that if this young lady failed to rouse his eccentric visitor the task was hopeless indeed.

"Will you pardon me, madam, if I detain you one moment," he said deferentially. "I should like, before you see the Count, to explain to you the reasons which induced me to insert that notice in the *Times*."

She tapped the floor impatiently with her foot.

"Be quick, then!"

"The Count arrived here on the first of the month, almost a fortnight ago. Immediately on his arrival he went out in a cab, and returned somewhat late at night, looking dazed

and ill. From that moment he has not left his room, and we fear, madam, to be candid, that he is losing his reason. He declines to go out to see a physician; to write to his friends. It is pitiable to see him, especially when one considers his long and painful imprisonment, from which he has only just been released. He would not listen to any suggestions or advice from us, so it occurred to me to put that advertisement in the paper unknown to him. May I be pardoned if I beg of you not to mention the means by which you became aware of his presence here, or to simply state that you saw his arrival chronicled in the paper? He may regard our interference in the light of a liberty, although it was solely for his good."

"It was a liberty to take!" she answered coldly. "I will not promise anything. I dare say I shall not mention it."

"There is one thing more which I should tell you, madam," he continued. "Two days ago a visitor came to see him, having noticed in the paper, as you have done, the paragraph I inserted. I will not tell you her name, but she was one of the most beautiful and distinguished Englishwomen of our aristocracy, and from the manner of her departure, I could not help coming to the conclusion that the Count, by some means or other, had frightened her to death.

She was nearly fainting as she came downstairs, and she has not been here since. I have no reason, beyond what I have told you, to doubt the Count's sanity, but I think that it is right for you to know this."

"Very well. I am not afraid. Kindly take me to him at once, now!" she directed.

He led her out of the apartment, and up the broad staircase. Outside the door of the Count's sitting-room he paused.

"Shall I announce you, madam?" he asked.

"No! Go away!" she answered shortly. "I wish to enter alone."

CHAPTER XVI

A NEW MEMBER FOR THE ORDER

COUNT MARIONI sat in his old attitude, brooding over the fire from the depths of his armchair, with a sad, vacant look in his dull eyes. At first he took no notice of the opening of the door, but as the light, smooth footsteps crossed the floor toward him and hesitated at his side, he glanced wearily up. In a moment his whole expression was changed. He was like a numbed and torpid figure suddenly galvanized into acute life.

He passed his hand swiftly across his eyes, and his thin fingers grasped the sides of his chair with nervous force. Ah! he must be dreaming again! It was one of the faces of the past, tempting and mocking him! Yet, no! she stood there; surely she stood there. Mother of God! Was this madness come at last?

"Margharita!" he cried, stretching out his hands toward her. "Margharita!"

It was no dream, then, nor was it madness. It was truth. There were loving, clinging

arms around his neck, a passionate, weeping face pressed close against his. Hot tears, her tears, were tricking down his hollow cheeks, kindling his stagnant blood by their warmth, and thawing the apathetic chill whose icy hand had lain so heavy upon him. A sob escaped him. His eager, trembling fingers pushed back the clustering hair from her temples. He peered wonderingly into her face. It must be a vision; it would surely fade away, and leave him once more in the outer darkness. Five-and-twenty years had passed! She had been like this then! A sense of bewilderment crept in upon him.

"Margharita!" he exclaimed feebly. "I do not understand! You are Margharita; you have her hair, her eyes, her mouth! And yet, of course, it cannot be. Ah, no! it cannot be!"

"You are thinking of my mother," she cried softly. "She loved you so much. I am like her, am I not?"

"Married! Margharita married! Ah, of course! I had forgotten. And you are her child. My sister's child. Ah, five-and-twenty years is a long time."

"It is a shameful, cruel time," she cried passionately. "My mother used to tell me of it, when I was a little girl, and her voice would

shake with anger and pity. Francesca, too, would talk to me about you. I prayed for you every evening when I was little, that they might soon set you free again. Oh, it was cruel!"

She threw her arms around his neck, and he rested his head upon her shoulder. It was like an elixir of life for him.

"And your mother, Margharita?" he asked fearfully.

"She is dead," was the low reply.

"Ah! Margharita dead! She was so like you, child. Dead! Five-and-twenty years is a weary while. Dead!"

He sighed, and his tearless eyes looked thoughtfully into the fire. Memories of other days were rising up and passing before him in swift procession. He saw himself and her, orphan brother and sister, wandering hand in hand over their beautiful island home, with the sea wind blowing in their faces, and the spirit of the mountains which towered around them entering into their hearts. Dear to them had been that home, dear that close and precious companionship. They had talked of the life which lay before them—rose-colored and joyous, pregnant with glorious opportunities and possibilities. For their island and the larger continent close at hand were

convulsed at that time in certain patriotic efforts, the history of which has been written into the history of Europe, and no one desired more ardently to bear a hand in the struggle than young Leonardo di Marioni. Large hearted, romantic, and with an imagination easily fired, he was from the first a dreamer, and Margharita had ever been ready to share his dreams. The blood of kings was in their veins, to lead him on to great things; and she, Margharita, his sister, his beloved sister, should be the mistress of his destinies. Thus they had talked, thus they had dreamed, and now from the other side of the gulf he looked backward, and saw in his own life, in the place of those great deeds which he had hoped to accomplish, one black miserable chasm, and in hers, forgetfulness of her high descent—for she had married this English merchant's son—and the grave. Ah! it was sad, very sad!

Her soft breath upon his cheek brought him back to the present. He looked down into her face with such a wistful fondness that it brought the tears again into her eyes.

"Your mother, then, married Martin Briscoe?"

"Yes."

"And he——"

"My father, too, is dead," she answered sadly. "I am an orphan."

"Ah! And now you live—with whom do you live, child?" he asked, with sudden eagerness. "Tell me, are you happy?"

"I am miserable," she cried passionately.

A quiet smile flitted across his face. There was hope. It was well.

"I am miserable. Often I wish that I were dead."

"Tell me all about it, child," he whispered. "I have a right to know."

She sank down upon the floor, and rested her head upon the side of the chair. In a moment she began.

"I think that I was quite happy when I was a little girl. I do not remember very much about that time, or about my mother, for she died when I was six years old. Papa was very good to me, but he was stern and cold always. I do not think that he ever smiled after mamma died, and he had money troubles, too. A bank failed, and he lost a great deal; and then he had a great many shares in a company which failed. I don't understand much about it, but when he died three years ago nearly everything he had went to pay people. I had to go and live with my father's brother, and I hate it. I hate

them all—my uncle, my aunt, and my cousins. They are vulgar, common people. They are in business, and they are fearfully rich, but their manners are dreadful, and they are always talking of their money. They have no taste, no art, no refinement. I was going to leave them, when I heard that you were here. I was going to be a governess—yes, even earn my own bread—rather than stay with them any longer. I hated them so, and their life, and everything to do with them. Oh, uncle, uncle, let me live with you. Let us go away from this wretched England. Let us go to some southern country where the sun is warm, and the people do not talk of their money, and there are beautiful things to see and admire. It is ugly and cold here, and I am weary of it."

She broke off in a sudden fit of sobbing. He took her face gently in his hands, and held it up to him. It was he, now, who was to play the part of consoler.

"Margharita, I am a lonely old man whose life is well nigh spent. Yet, if you will come to me, if you will really live with me, then you will make my last days happy. When I die all that I have will be yours. It is settled, is it not?"

Like summer lightning the tempest of her

grief died away, and her face was brilliant with smiles.

"I will never, never leave you, uncle," she cried joyously. "We will live together always. Oh, how happy we shall be!"

Then she looked at him—looked at his shrunken limbs and worn, pinched face, and a sudden darkening fire kindled in her face. She stamped her foot, and her eyes flashed angrily. The sight of him reminded her that, so far as he was concerned at least, their happiness could not be of very long duration. The finger of death had laid its mark upon that ashen gray face. It was written there.

"How I hate them!" she cried. "Those cruel, wicked people, who kept you in prison all these years. I should like to kill them all—to see them die here before us. I would not spare one—not one!"

He thrust her away, and started to his feet a changed man. The old fires had leaped up anew; the old hate, the old desire, was as strong as ever within him. She looked at him, startled and wondering. His very form seemed dilated with passion.

"Child!" he cried, "have you ever heard the story of my seizure and imprisonment? No, you have not. You shall hear it. You shall judge between me and them. Listen!

When I was a young man, Italy seemed trembling on the verge of a revolution. The history of it all you know. You know that the country was honeycombed with secret societies, more or less dangerous. To one of these I belonged. We called our Order the 'Order of the White Hyacinth.' We were all young, ardent and impetuous, and we imagined ourselves the apostles of the coming liberation. Yet we never advocated bloodshed; we never really transgressed the law. We gave lectures, we published pamphlets. We were a set of boy dreamers with wild theories—communists, most of us. But there was not one who would not have died to save our country the misery of civil war—not one, not one! Even women wore our flower, and were admitted associates of our Order. We pledged ourselves that our aims were bloodless. No society that ever existed was more harmless than ours. I say it! I swear it! Bear me witness, oh, my God, if what I say be not true!"

He was a strong man again. The apathy was gone; his reason was saved. He stood before this dark, tall girl, who, with clasped hands, was drinking in every word, and he spoke with all the swelling dignity of one who has suffered unjustly.

"By some means or other our society fell under the suspicion of the government. The edict went forth that we should be broken up. We heard the mandate with indignation. We were young and hot-blooded, and we were conscious that we had done no harm—that we were innocent of the things ascribed to us. We swore that we would carry on our society, but in secret. Before then, everything had been open; we had had a recognized meeting place, the public had attended our lectures, ladies had worn the white hyacinth openly at receptions and balls. Now, all was changed. We met in secret and under a ban. Still our aim was harmless. One clause alone was added to our rules of a different character, and we all subscribed to—'Vengeance upon traitors!' We swore it solemnly one to the other—'Vengeance upon traitors!' "

"Ah! if I had lived in those days I would have worn your flower at the court of the king," she cried, with glowing cheeks.

He pressed her hand in silence, and continued.

"As time went on, and things grew still more unsettled in the country, a species of inquisition was established. The eyes of the law were everywhere. They fell upon us. One night ten of us were arrested as we left our meeting

place. We were all noble, and the families of my companions were powerful. I was looked upon as the ringleader; and upon me fell the most severe sentence. I was banished from Italian soil for ten years, with the solemn warning that death would be my lot if I ventured to return."

"It was atrocious!"

He held up his hand.

"Margharita, in those days I loved. Her name was Adrienne. She, too, was an orphan, and although she was of noble birth, she was poor, as we Marionis were poor also. She had a great gift; she was a singer; and, sooner than be dependent upon her relatives, she had sung at concerts and operas, until all Europe knew of her fame. When I was exiled I was given seven days in which to make my adieux. I went to her, and declared my love. She did not absolutely reject me, nor did she accept me. She asked for time for consideration. I could give her none! I begged her to leave the country with me. Alas! she would not! Perhaps I was too passionate, too precipitate! It may have been so; I cannot say. I went away alone and left her. I plunged into gay life at Paris; I dwelt among the loneliest mountains of Switzerland; I endured the dullness of this cold gray London, and the dissi-

pation of Vienna. It was all in vain! One by one they palled upon me. No manner of life, no change of scene, could cure me of my love. I fell ill, and I knew that my heart was breaking. You and I, Margharita, come of a race whose love and hatred are eternal!"

She crept into his arms; and he went on, holding her there.

"Back I came at the peril of my life; content to die, if it were only at her feet. I found her cold and changed; blaming me even for my rashness, desiring even my absence. Not a word of pity to sweeten those weary days of exile; not a word of hope to repay me for all that I had risked to see her again. Soon I knew the reason—another love had stolen away her heart. There was an Englishman—one of those cursed Englishmen—visiting her daily at Palermo; and she told me calmly one day that she loved him, and intended to become his wife. She forgot my long years of devoted service; she forgot her own unspoken, yet understood, promise; she forgot all that I had suffered for her; she forgot that her words must sound to me as the death warrant of all joy and happiness in this world. And she forgot, too, that I was a Marioni! Was I wrong, I wonder, Margharita, that I quarreled with him! You are a child, and yet my

instinct tells me that you have a woman's judgment! Tell me, should I have stepped aside, and let him win her, without a blow?"

"You would have been a coward if you had!" she cried. "You fought him! Tell me that you fought him?"

"Margharita, you are a true daughter of your country!" the old man cried. "You are a Marioni! Listen! I insulted him! He declined to fight! I struck him across the face in a public restaurant, and forced him to accept my challenge. The thing was arranged. We stood face to face on the sand, sword in hand. The word had been given! His life was at my mercy; but mind, Margharita, I had no thought of taking it without giving him a fair chance. I intended to wait until my sword was at his throat, and then I would have said to him, 'Give up the woman whom I have loved all my life, and go unhurt!' He himself should have chosen. Was not that fair?"

"Fair! It was generous! Go on! Go on!"

"The word had been given; our swords were crossed. And at that moment, she, Adrienne, the woman whom I loved, stood before us. With her were Italian police come

to arrest me! There was one letter alone of mine, written in a hasty moment, which could have been used in evidence against me at my former trial, and which would have secured for me a harsher sentence. That letter had fallen into her hands; and she had given it over to my bitter enemy, the chief of the Italian police. I was betrayed, betrayed by the woman whom I had braved all dangers to see! It was she who had brought them; she who—without remorse or hesitation—calmly handed me over to twenty-five years' captivity in a prison cell!"

Margharita freed herself from his arms. She was very pale, and her limbs were shaking. But what a fire in those dark, cruel eyes.

"Go on! Go on!" she cried. "Let me hear the rest."

"Then, as I stood there, Margharita, love shriveled up, and hate reigned in its place. The memory of the oath of our Order flashed into my mind. A curtain seemed raised before my eyes. I saw the long narrow room of our meeting place. I saw the dark, faithful faces of my comrades. I heard their firm voices—'Vengeance upon traitors, vengeance upon traitors!' She, too, this woman who had betrayed me, had worn our flower upon her bosom and in her hair! She had come under

the ban of that oath. Margharita, I threw my sword into the sea, and I raised my clasped hands to the sky, and I swore that, were it the last day of my life, the day of my release should see me avenged. Let them hide in the uttermost corners of the earth, I cried, that false woman and her English lover, still I would find them out, and they should taste of my vengeance! To my trial I went, with that oath written in my heart. I carried it with me into my prison cell, and day by day and year by year I repeated it to myself. It kept me alive; the desire of it grew into my being. Even now it burns in my heart!

"During my captivity I was allowed to see my lawyer, and I made over by deed so much, to be paid every year to the funds of our Order at the London Branch, for our headquarters had been moved there after my first arrest. Day by day I dreamed of the time when I should stand, a martyr in their cause, before my old comrades, and demand of them the vengeance which was my due. I imagined them, one by one, grasping my hand, full of deep, silent sympathy with my long sufferings. I heard again the oath which we had sworn—'Vengeance upon traitors, vengeance upon traitors!' It was the music which kept me alive, the hope which nourished my life!"

The dark eyes glowed upon him like stars, and her voice trembled with eagerness.

"You have been to them? You will be avenged! Tell me that it is so?"

A little choking sob escaped from him. The numbness was passing away from his heart and senses. His sorrows were becoming human, and demanding human expression.

"Alas, Margharita, alas!" he cried, with drooping head, "the bitterest disappointment of my life came upon me all unawares. While I have lain rotting in prison history has turned over many pages. The age for secret societies has gone by. The 'Order of the White Hyacinth' is no more—worse than that, its very name has been dragged through the dust. One by one the old members fell away; its sacred aims were forgotten. The story of its downward path will never be written. A few coarse, ignorant men meet in a pothouse, night by night, to spend the money I sent in beer and foul tobacco. That is the end of the 'Order of the White Hyacinth!' "

Margharita looked like a beautiful wild animal in her passion. Her hair had fallen all over her face, and was streaming down her back. Her small white hand was clenched and upraised, and her straight, supple figure, panther-like in its grace, was distended until

she towered over the little shrunken form before her. Terrible was the gleam in her eyes, and terrible the fixed rigidity of her features. Yet she was as beautiful as a young goddess in her wrath.

"No!" she cried fiercely, "the Order shall not die! You belong to it still; and I—I, too, swear the oath of vengeance! Together we will hunt her down—this woman! She shall suffer!"

"She shall die!" he cried.

A slight shudder passed across the girl's face, but she repeated his words.

"She shall die! But, uncle, you are ill. What is it?"

She chafed his hands and held him up. He had fainted.

CHAPTER XVII

THE RETURN TO REASON

"WHERE am I, Margharita?"

She leaned over him, and drew a long deep breath of relief. It was the reward of many weary days and nights of constant watching and careful nursing. His reason was saved.

"In your own room at the hotel," she whispered. "Don't you remember? You were taken ill."

He looked at her, helpless and puzzled. Slowly the mists began to roll away.

"Yes, you were with me," he murmured softly. "I remember now. I was telling you the story of the past—my past. You are Margharita's child. Yes, I remember. Was it this afternoon?"

She kissed his forehead, and then drew back suddenly, lest the warm tear which was quivering on her eyelid should fall back upon his face.

"It was three weeks ago!"

"Three weeks ago!" He looked wonderingly around—at the little table at his side, where a

huge bowl of sweet-scented roses was surrounded by a little army of empty medicine bottles, at Margharita's pale, wan face, and at a couch drawn up to the bedside. "And you have been nursing me all the time?" he whispered.

She smiled brightly through the tears which she could not hide.

"Of course I have. Who has a better right, I should like to know?"

He sighed and closed his eyes. In a few minutes he was asleep.

For a fortnight his life had hung upon a thread, and even when the doctor had declared him out of danger, the question of his sanity or insanity quivered upon the balance for another week. He would either awake perfectly reasonable, in all respects his old self, or he would open his eyes upon a world, the keynote to which he had lost forever. In other words he would either awake a perfectly sane man, or hopelessly and incurably insane. There would be no middle course. That was the doctor's verdict.

And through all those long days and nights Margharita had watched over him as though he had been her own father. All the passionate sympathy of her warm southern nature had been kindled by the story of his wrongs. Day

by day the sight of his helpless suffering had increased her indignation toward those whom she really believed to have bitterly wronged him. Through those long quiet days and silent nights, she had brooded upon them. She never for one moment repented of having allied herself to that wild oath of vengeance, whose echoes often at dead of night seemed still to ring in her ears. Her only fear was that he would emerge from the fierce illness under which he was laboring, so weakened and shaken, that the desire of his life should have passed from him. She had grown to love this shrunken old man. In her girlhood she had heard stories of him from her nurse, and many times the hot tears had stood in her eyes as she conjured up to herself that pathetic figure, waiting and waiting, year by year, for that liberty which was to come only with old age. She had thought of him, sad-eyed and weary, pacing his lonely prison cell, and ever watching through his barred window the little segment of blue sky and sunlight which penetrated into the high-walled court. How he must long for the scent of flowers, the fresh open air, the rustle of leaves, and the hum of moving insects. How his heart must ache for the sound of men's voices, the touch of their hands, some sense of loving or friendly companionship to break the

icy monotony of his weary, stagnant existence. Her imagination had been touched, and she had been all ready to welcome and to love him as a hero and a martyr, even if he had appealed to her in no other way. But when she had seen him stricken down and helpless, with that look of ineffable sadness in his soft dark eyes, it was more than her sympathy which was aroused, more than her imagination which was stirred. Her large pitying heart became his absolutely. She was alone in the world, and she must needs love some one. For good or for evil, fate had brought this strange old man to her, and woven this tie between them.

That night she scarcely slept at all, and before daybreak she stole softly over to the window and looked out. The roar of the great city was hushed and silent. Below, the streets and squares were white and empty in the gray light of the approaching dawn. The mists were rising from the river, and the yellow light was dying out of the room. Away eastward, there was a break in the sky, a long thin line of amber light which widened even while she watched it. Below, the sky was red, a dull brick red, as though the yellow fog had mingled with the fainter and rosier coloring. Gradually the two came nearer together. In the distance a cock crew, and a cab drove

across the empty square at the end of the street. A lamplighter came round the corner, whistling, and, one by one, the row of gaslights beneath were extinguished. Even in that moment or two a brighter shade had stolen into the eastern sky. That bank of dull purple clouds was breaking away, and a few brilliant specks of cloudlets were shot up toward St. Paul's. Then the sun showed a rim, and almost its first pale beam quivered upon the great church dome, traveled across a thousand slate roofs, and fell upon the girl's white, upturned face, and across the white coverlet.

"Margharita!"

She turned round quickly. He was sitting up in bed, and the sunbeam was traveling up toward him.

"Are you awake? Did I disturb you?" she asked tenderly.

He shook his head.

"I have been awake, thinking. I remember being taken ill. I remember everything. Tell me. I must know. Did you—did you mean—everything you said? You pitied me, and my story made you sad. I would not hold you to your word."

She drew herself up; she was pale no longer; the color burned in her cheeks.

"I am a Marioni!" she answered proudly.

"Every word I said seems to me now too weak. That is the only change."

He held out his hands; she grasped them fondly.

"Margharita, she came here!" he whispered.

"What, here? Here in this room?"

He nodded.

"It was two days before you came. I was sitting alone in the twilight. The door opened. I thought I was dreaming. It was she, as beautiful as ever, richly dressed, happy, comely. She came to pity, to sue for pardon. I let her talk, and then, when I had gathered strength, I stood up and cursed her. I thrust her away; I cursed her with the fiercest and cruelest words which my lips could utter. It drove the warm color from her cheeks, and the light from her eyes. I cursed her till her heart shook with fear. She staggered out of the room a stricken woman. I——"

"Tell me her name."

"It was Adrienne Cartuccio. It is now Lady Maurice."

"The Lady St. Maurice! She was my mother's friend then?"

"Yes."

Margharita's eyes were bright, and her voice trembled.

"Listen!" she cried. "When my mother was

dying she gave me a letter. If ever you need a friend or help," she whispered, "go to Lady St. Maurice. This letter is to her. She will help you for my sake. Uncle, fate is on our side. Just before I came to you I wrote to Lady St. Maurice. I told her that I was unhappy in my life, and I wished for a situation as a governess. I sent her my mother's letter."

"And she replied?"

"Yes. She offered me a home. If I wished I could teach her little girl."

Her voice was trembling, and her eyes, dry and brilliant, were fixed upon his. He was sitting upright in bed, leaning a little forward toward her, and the sunbeam which had stolen in through the parted curtains fell upon his white corpse-like face. A strange look was in his eyes; his fingers clutched the bedclothes nervously.

"You will—go?" he asked hoarsely. "You will go to Lady St. Maurice?"

An answering light shot back from her eyes. She was suddenly pale to the lips. Her voice was hushed as though in fear, but it was firm.

"Yes, I shall go. To-night I shall accept her offer."

CHAPTER XVIII

"I HAVE A FEAR—A FOOLISH FEAR"

"GEOFF, it's the most extraordinary thing in the world."

"What is it, dear?" he asked, throwing down his newspaper on the breakfast table, and lighting a cigarette. "Tell me about it."

"Listen."

She read the letter, which was open in her hands, and he listened thoughtfully, leaning back in the high-backed oak chair, and watching the blue smoke from his cigarette curl upward to the ceiling.

"LONDON, *Thursday.*

"DEAR LADY ST. MAURICE: I have delayed answering your letter for some time, longer than may seem courteous to you, owing to the illness of a member of the family with whom I have been living. I trust, however, that you will not consider it too late for me to thank you heartily for your generous offer to me, which, if we can agree upon one point, I shall be most happy and grateful to accept. You have a little girl, you tell me, and no governess. If

you will allow me to fill the latter position, which I believe that I am quite capable of doing, I shall be glad to come. I could not feel myself at ease in becoming one of your household on any other footing. Hoping to hear from you soon, I am, yours sincerely,

"MARGHARITA BRISCOE."

"Did you ever hear of such a thing?" Lady St. Maurice exclaimed. "Margharita's child, my governess. I call it very stupid pride."

Lord St. Maurice shook his head.

"I think you are wrong, dear. After all, you must remember that you are a complete stranger to her."

"That has been her mother's fault. Margharita never exactly blamed me for what I did at Palermo, but she always felt bitterly for her brother, and she could not forget that it was my hand which had sent him to prison. It was very unreasonable of her, but, after all, one can understand her feeling. Still, this girl of hers can have no such feeling toward me."

"Of course not; but, none the less, as I said before, you are a complete stranger to her," Lord St. Maurice answered. "Her parentage is just the sort to have given her those independent ideas, and I'm inclined to think that she is quite right."

Lady St. Maurice sighed.

"I would have been only too happy to have welcomed her as a daughter," she said. "I dare say you are right, Geoff. I shall write and tell her to come."

She walked away to the window, looking across the pine-bound cliffs to the sea. Time had dealt with her very leniently, as indeed he needs must with those whose life is like one long summer's day. Her brow was still smooth, and her hair, rich and soft as ever, had not a single tinge of gray. Her figure, too, was perfect; the lithe gracefulness of youth had only ripened into the majesty of dignified womanhood. There was not a society paper which did not sometimes allude to her as "the beautiful Lady St. Maurice."

But just at that moment her eyes were sad, and her face was troubled. Her husband, looking up suddenly, saw it, and throwing down his paper, walked across the room to her side.

"Adrienne, what is it, little woman?" he asked fondly.

"I was thinking of poor Leonardo," she answered. "Geoffrey, it is very foolish to let it trouble me, is it not?"

"Very, darling. Why should it?"

"Do you remember how terrible he looked

when they arrested him on the sands, and those fierce threatening words of his? Even now I can hear them sometimes in my ears."

"Foolish little woman."

"I cannot help it. This girl's letter, with its note of proud independence, brings it all back to me. Geoffrey, Leonardo di Marioni comes of a race who pride themselves more than anything upon keeping their word in love and in hate. You can scarcely understand their fierce passionate nature. I have always felt that when the day of his release came he would remember his oath, and strive to work some evil upon us."

Lord St. Maurice passed his arm around his wife's waist, with a reassuring smile.

"It is five-and-twenty years ago, love. Is not that enough to set your fears at rest?"

She looked at him without a smile, grave and serious.

"The five-and-twenty years are up, Geoffrey. Leonardo is free!"

"What of it?" he answered carelessly. "If he has not forgotten us altogether, what harm could he do us?"

She clasped her hands around his neck, and looked into his face.

"Geoffrey, I have a confession to make," she whispered. "Will you forgive me?"

"It's a rash promise, but I'll chance it," he answered, smoothing her hair and smiling down into her upturned face.

"Geoffrey, he is in London. I have seen him."

He looked a little surprised, but he did not draw away.

"Seen him! Where? When?"

"Do you remember the day when I was to have called for you at the 'Travelers,' and you waited for me, and I did not come? Yes, I know that you do. Well, I did come, really, but as I sat in the carriage waiting, I took up the *Morning Post* and I read an advertisement there, signed by the manager of the Continental Hotel. It was inquiring for any friend or relative of Count Leonardo di Marioni, who was lying there dangerously ill and alone. Geoffrey, of course I ought to have waited for you, but I am impulsive sometimes, and I was then. I thought that if I could see him alone for the first time, that I might win his forgiveness, and so I drove there at once. They showed me into his room; he was sitting over the fire, a miserable, shrunken little figure, wasted to a shadow. Ah, how my heart ached to see him. Geoffrey, I knelt by his side; I spoke to him as tenderly as I could to one of my own children; and then he turned a white

corpse-like face upon me, and spoke words which God grant I may some day forget. I do not believe that human lips have ever framed such hideous curses. How I got down to the carriage, I do not know. You are not angry with me, Geoffrey?"

"Angry? why no, love," he answered tenderly. "You did it for the best. What a vindictive little beggar."

"Geoffrey, I can't help thinking that some day, if he recovers, he will try to do you or me a mischief."

Lord St. Maurice laughed outright.

"We are not in Sicily," he answered lightly.

"What could he do to either of us? Am I not big enough to protect myself, and take care of you? I tell you what, Adrienne, why shouldn't I go and see him when I am in London next week?"

"You!" She shuddered and clasped him tightly. "Geoffrey, promise me at once that you will not go near him," she begged. "Promise me!"

"On one condition."

"What is it?"

"That you will give up troubling about this nonsense."

"I will try," she promised.

"That's right. Now put on your hat, and

come for a run on the cliff. I can't have you looking so pale."

He walked to the door with her and opened it, kissing her forehead as she passed through. She looked up at him fondly, and the quiet pleasure which glowed for a moment in her cheeks and shone in her eyes made her look once more like a girl of twenty. A woman's greatest happiness had been hers. In middle age her husband was still her lover.

"Forgive me for being silly," she whispered. "I can't help it. Our life has been so happy that I cannot bear to think of a cloud of any sort coming over it, even for a very short while."

"The only cloud we have to fear is that big fellow yonder over Gorton point," he laughed.

"Better bring your mackintosh down. I shall not shoot to-day until I have seen some color in your cheeks."

CHAPTER XIX

THE NEW GOVERNESS

NONE of the little household at Mallory Grange, Lord St. Maurice's Norfolk seat, ever forgot Margharita's first appearance among them. She came late in the afternoon, and was shown into Lady St. Maurice's own little sitting room, without the ceremony of an announcement. Lady St. Maurice had many kind words ready to say, but the sight of the figure who crossed the threshold, and came out of the dusk toward the center of the room, struck her dumb. She stood up for a moment perfectly silent, with her hand pressed to her side. Such a likeness was marvelous. In this girl's proud, dark face she could recall Leonardo's features one by one. The air seemed suddenly full of voices, sobbing and cursing and threatening. Then she came to herself, and held out her hand—forced her lips even to wear a kindly welcoming smile.

"I am so glad to have you here, Margharita," she said. "Do you know that your likeness to your mother—and her family—has startled me. It is wonderful."

"It is very nice to hear you say so," the girl answered, taking the chair which, at Lady St. Maurice's motion, a servant had wheeled up to the fire. "I like to think of myself as belonging altogether to my mother and her people. I have been very unhappy with my father's relations."

"I am only sorry that you remained with them so long," Lady St. Maurice said. "Let me give you some tea, and then you must tell me why you never wrote to me before."

"Because I made up my mind to bear it as long as I was able," she answered. "I have done so. It was impossible for me to remain there any longer, and I determined to take my life into my own hands, and, if necessary, find a situation. I wrote first to you, and you have been kind enough to engage me."

To Lady St. Maurice, who was a woman of genial manners and kindly disposition, there seemed to be a curious hardness in the girl's tone and mode of expressing herself. She had avoided the kiss with which she had been prepared to greet her, and had shaken hands in the most matter-of-fact way. This last phrase, too, was a little ungracious.

"Engage you! I hope you are not going to look upon our little arrangement in that light," Lady St. Maurice said pleasantly. "For

your mother's sake, Margharita, I should have been only too glad to have welcomed you here at any time as my daughter, and I hope that when we know one another better, you will not be quite so independent. Don't be afraid," she added, "you shall have your own way at first. Some day I hope that you will come round to mine."

Margharita sipped her tea quietly, and made no reply; but in the firelight her dark eyes glowed softly and brightly, and Lady St. Maurice was quite satisfied with her silence. For a few moments neither of them spoke. Then Lady St. Maurice leaned back in her chair, away from the firelight, and asked a question.

"Did you know that the Count di Marioni, your uncle, was in London?"

"I knew that he had been there," Margharita answered in a low tone.

"Had been! Has he gone away?"

"I suppose so," the girl continued, looking steadily at her questioner. "Yesterday I called to see him at a hotel in Piccadilly, and they told me that he had left that morning for abroad. I was sorry to be too late."

"Yes."

Lady St. Maurice asked no more. The dark eyes seemed to be trying to pierce the dusk between them, and read her face. She turned

the conversation, and asked a few questions about the journey. Afterward would be time enough to find out how much this girl knew.

Soon Lord St. Maurice came in from shooting, wet to the skin, and stood by the fire, drinking his tea and talking pleasantly to Margharita and his wife. She talked more readily to him than to Lady St. Maurice, but in the middle of the conversation she checked herself and stood up.

"I am tired," she said abruptly. "May I go to my room?"

Lady St. Maurice took her away herself, and showed her the suite which had been prepared for her. There was a bedroom, a daintily furnished little sitting room, and a bath room, all looking out upon the sea. A bright fire had been lit in both the rooms, and bowls of flowers and many little feminine trifles helped to unite comfort to undoubted luxury. Margharita went from one to the other without remark.

"These are far too nice," she said simply, when Lady St. Maurice turned to go. "I have not been used to such luxury."

Lady St. Maurice left her with a sigh, and went downstairs. She had hoped to see the cold proud face relax a little at the many signs of thought in the preparations which had

been made for her, and she was disappointed. She entered her sitting room thoughtfully, and went up to her husband.

"Geoffrey, she is horribly like him."

"If poor Marioni had had this girl's looks I should have felt more jealous," he answered lightly. "I'm almost sorry Lumley is here."

She shook her head.

"She is beautiful, but I don't think Lumley will admire her. He places expression before everything, and this girl has none. She must have been very unhappy, I think, or else she is very heartless!"

He stood with his back to the fire, twisting his mustache and warming himself.

"The fact is," he remarked, "you're disappointed because she didn't jump into your arms and cry a little, and all that sort of thing. Now, I respect the girl for it; for I think she was acting under constraint. Give her time, Adrienne, and I think you'll find her sympathetic enough. And as to the expression—well, I may be mistaken, but I should say that she had a sweeter one than most women, although we haven't seen it yet. Give her time, Adrienne. Don't hurry her."

It was two hours before they saw her again, and then she came into the drawing room just as the dinner gong was going.

Neither of them had seen her save by the dim light of a single lamp, and even then she had been wrapped in a long traveling coat; and so, although Lord St. Maurice had called her beautiful, they were neither of them prepared to see her quite as she was. She wore a plain black net dinner gown, curving only slightly downward at the white throat, the somberness of which was partially relieved by an amber foundation. She had no jewelry of any sort, nor any flowers, and she carried only a tiny lace handkerchief in her left hand. But she had no need of a toilet or of adornment. That proud, exquisitely graceful carriage, which only race can give, was the dowry of her descent from one of the ancient families of Southern Europe; but the beauty of her face was nature's gift alone. It was beauty of the best and purest French type—the beauty of the aristocrats of the court of Louis the Fourteenth. The luxurious black hair was parted in the middle, and raised slightly over the temples, showing a high but delicately arched forehead. Her complexion was dazzling in its purity, but colorless. There was none of the harshness of the Sicilian type in her features, or in the lines of her figure. The severest critic of feminine beauty could have asked only for a slightly relaxed mouth, and

a touch of humanity in her dark, still eyes; and even he, knowing that the great joys of womanhood—the joys of loving and being loved—were as yet untasted by her, would have held his peace, murmuring, perhaps, that the days of miracles were not yet passed, and a daughter of Diana had appeared upon the earth.

The little group, to whom her entrance was something like a thunderbolt, consisted only of Lord and Lady St. Maurice, and their son, Lord Lumley. He, although his surprise was the greatest, was the first to recover from it.

"I am happy to meet you in proper form, Miss Briscoe," he said, bowing, and then looking into her face with a humorous light in his eyes. "I was afraid that I should never have the opportunity of telling you that those fellows met with, at any rate, a part of what they deserved. I saw them locked up."

She looked at him for a moment with slightly arched eyebrows, and then suddenly smiled.

"Oh! is it really you?" she exclaimed, holding out her hand, which she had not previously offered. "I am so glad. I was afraid that I should never have the opportunity to thank you for your kindness."

"You have met Lumley before, then?" asked Lady St. Maurice, wondering.

"Scarcely so much as that," he answered, laughing. "Don't you remember my telling you of my adventure in Piccadilly, mother?"

"Yes, I remember. Do you mean that the young lady was really Margharita?"

She looked at him, and he colored slightly. For the first time he remembered how enthusiastically he had spoken of the girl whom he had assisted, and Lady St. Maurice remembered, too, that for several days afterward he had been silent and distrait. She could not fail to remember it, for it was the first time she had ever heard Lumley admire a girl in such terms.

"Yes, it was Miss Briscoe," he answered, keeping his head turned away from his mother.

"It was indeed I," she admitted. "I don't know what I should have done, but for your help, Lord Lumley. I am afraid that I should have screamed and made a scene."

"I can't imagine your doing it!" he remarked truthfully.

"Perhaps not! But I was so surprised, I could not understand it."

"May I remind you that I am completely in the dark as to this little adventure," Lord St. Maurice remarked pleasantly. "What was it, Lumley?"

"A very simple affair after all. I was in

Piccadilly, and Miss Briscoe here was coming out of some milliner's shop and crossing the pavement to her carriage."

"Cab!" she interrupted.

"Cab, then. Well, it was late in the afternoon, and two drunken little cads tried to speak to her. Naturally, as I was the nearest decent person, I interfered and assisted Miss Briscoe into her cab. That I was passing was a piece of good fortune for which I have always been thankful."

"Lord Lumley does not add that his interference consisted in knocking one man down and holding the other until he almost choked with one hand, while he helped me into the cab with the other."

"I only shook him a little," he laughed, giving his mother his arm, for the butler had announced dinner while they had been talking. "If I had been he I would rather have had the shaking than the look Miss Briscoe flashed at him."

"I detest being touched," she said coldly, "especially by a stranger."

"How did the affair end?" Lord St. Maurice asked, sipping his soup. "I hope you got them locked up, Lumley."

"Why, the termination of the affair was the part on which I do really congratulate myself,"

he answered. "A policeman came up at once, but before I could give them in charge—in which case I should, of course, have been called upon to prosecute and got generally mixed up in the affair—one of the fellows began thumping the policeman; so of course he collared them and marched them off. I slipped away, and I noticed the next morning that they got pretty heavily fined for assaulting a policeman in the execution of his duty."

"A satisfactory ending to a most unpleasant affair," Lord St. Maurice remarked.

During dinner Lord Lumley devoted himself to their guest, but for a long time the burden of the conversation lay altogether upon his shoulders. It was not until he chanced to mention the National Gallery, in connection with the season's exhibition of pictures, that Margharita abandoned her monosyllabic answers and generally reserved demeanor. He saw at once that he had struck the right note, and he followed it up with tact. He was fresh from a tour among the galleries of southern Europe and Holland, and he himself was no mean artist. But Margharita, he soon found, knew nothing of recent art. She was hopelessly out of date. She knew nothing of the modern cant, of the nineteenth century philistinism, at which it was so much the fashion to

scoff. She had not caught the froth of the afternoon talk at fashionable studios, and, having jumbled it together in the popular fashion, she was not prepared to set forth her views on art in somebody else's pet phrases. Lord Lumley had met that sort of young lady, and had shunned her. Margharita had simply acquired from a hurried visit to Italy, when she was quite young, a dim but vast appreciation of the soul of the great masters. She could not have defined art, nor could she have expressed in a few nicely-rounded sentences her opinion of Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece, or of the genius of Pico della Mirandola. But she felt that a great world lay beyond a larger knowledge and understanding of these things, and some day she hoped, after time, and thought, and study, to enter it.

And Lord Lumley, reading her thoughts with a keen and intuitive sympathy, talked to her that night at dinner and afterward in a corner of the perfumed rose-lit drawing room, as no man had ever talked to her before—talked to her so earnestly, and with so much effect, that Lady St. Maurice rose from her writing table at the other end of the room, watched them with pale and troubled face, and more than once made some faint effort to disturb them. He showed her the systems and

manner of thought by which the dimly-felt, wondering admiration of the uncultured, yet sensitive, mind can develop into the large and soul-felt appreciation of the artist. It was the keys of her promised land which he held out to her with winning speech and a kindliness to which she was unaccustomed. He was young himself, but he had all the advantages of correct training, of travel, and of delicate artistic sensibilities. He had taught himself much, and fresh from the task of learning, he had all the best enthusiasm of the teacher. He had told himself that he, too, like the Athenians, worshiped beauty, but never in his life had he seen anything so beautiful as Margharita's face as she listened to him. Spiritual life seemed to have been poured into a piece of beautiful imagery. Her lips were parted and her dark eyes were softened. It was the face of a St. Cecilia. How long before it would become the face of a woman!

It was Lord St. Maurice's arrival which dissolved the spell. He had missed his after-dinner cigar and chat with Lumley, and directly he entered the drawing room he saw the cause. Adrienne's eyes and his met. A little annoyed by his son's defection he did not hesitate to act.

"Miss Briscoe, are you too tired, or may we

ask for a little music?" he said, walking up to the pair.

She looked up, frowning a little at the interruption. Then a swift recollection of her position came to her, and the light died out of her face. She rose at once.

"I shall be pleased to do what I can. I sing a little, but I play badly."

She affected not to notice Lord St. Maurice's arm, but crossed the room by his side toward the piano. He opened it, arranged the stool, and remained standing there.

She struck a few minor chords, and suddenly the room seemed full of a sad, plaintive music, rising gradually to a higher pitch, and then dying away as her voice took up the melody and carried it on. Lady St. Maurice held her hand to her side for a moment, and her husband frowned. It was a Sicilian love song which she was singing; the song of a peasant whose bride lies dead by his side, the victim of another's jealousy. Adrienne had heard it often in the old days, and the beautiful wild music which rang in their ears was full of memories to her. It closed abruptly, and only Lumley, with an unusual sparkle in his eyes, found words to thank her.

"Are all your songs sad ones, Miss Briscoe?" Lord St. Maurice asked abruptly. "Can't

you offer us something in the shape of an antidote?"

She sat down at the piano again.

"I do not know anything gay," she said. "I can only sing what I feel. I will play something."

She dashed off into a light Hungarian dance, full of *verve* and sparkle, and Lord St. Maurice kept time with his foot, smiling approvingly. Directly it was over she closed the piano and turned to Lady St. Maurice.

"If I may I should be glad to go to my room now," she said. "I had no idea it was so late."

Lumley held the door open for her, and felt unreasonably disappointed because she passed out with a slight inclination of the head, but without looking at him. Then he turned back into the room, and they all three looked at one another for a moment.

"She is marvelously handsome," Lord St. Maurice pronounced.

"Marvelously!" his son echoed softly.

But Lady St. Maurice said nothing.

CHAPTER XX

LORD LUMLEY AND MARGHARITA

"GEOFFREY, come here for a moment!"

The Earl of St. Maurice, who was a most obedient husband, folded up his paper and joined his wife at the window.

"Well, dear."

"Look there."

He followed her finger. It pointed to three figures; a man in shooting clothes, with a gun under his arm, a girl and a child between them, strolling along the cliffs outside the grounds. He glanced at them carelessly, and back into his wife's face as though for an explanation.

"Well?"

"This is the third morning that Lumley has joined Margharita and Gracie in their walk."

"Very good natured of him," the Earl replied carelessly. "He always was fond of Gracie though, wasn't he?"

"I wish I could feel sure that it was entirely for Gracie's sake," she answered anxiously.

Her husband whistled, and his brows contracted a little.

"You mean to suggest, I suppose, that Miss

Briscoe is the attraction," he remarked thoughtfully.

"How can I help thinking so? Both yesterday and this morning he was in the schoolroom until I heard her tell him quite severely that he must go, as he was interrupting their work. Both mornings I have asked him to drive with me, and each time he made an excuse. If Margharita's name is mentioned before him, he is either unusually silent and reserved, or very talkative. As a rule, you know, Lumley does not care for girls. That makes me all the more anxious."

"Miss Briscoe is certainly wonderfully beautiful," he said. "Yet I think that Lumley has common sense."

"He has peculiar ideas," his wife answered. "I have always been afraid of his doing something *bizarre,* and as you say, Margharita is wonderfully beautiful—far more so than her mother, I think. What would you advise me to do, Geoffrey?"

He stroked his long gray mustache, and looked thoughtful.

"It's a delicate matter," he said. "To even hint at the girl going away because Lumley admires her would be unjust, and, at the same time, if Lumley got an inkling of the reason it would certainly make him think more of her

than he does now. You have no fault to find with her in any way?"

"None! absolutely none! Her behavior is perfect. She is proud, but I do not consider that a fault. Her manners are the manners of a perfectly-bred lady."

"And Gracie likes her?"

"Gracie adores her!"

"She certainly doesn't attempt to encourage Lumley in any way," the Earl continued thoughtfully.

"Her manners and behavior, in fact, her whole conduct, is perfectly irreproachable," Lady St. Maurice acknowledged. "In certain ways she has been a great disappointment to me, but I wish to be just to her, and I feel bound to say so. It makes the situation all the more difficult."

"In that case we can do nothing," her husband said decidedly. "Things must take their course. If they develop, as we will hope they may not, I will speak to Lumley privately."

"You see she is coming back because Lumley has joined them," Lady St. Maurice said. "Geoffrey, look at her now at the top of that hill. Does she not remind you of him?"

He took up a pair of field glasses from the table and looked at her steadily.

"Yes, she does," he admitted. "She is just like that poor fellow Marioni sometimes. I never noticed it so clearly."

"She is horribly like him, and, Geoffrey, it is foolish of me, but sometimes she looks at me with his eyes. It makes me shiver."

"Foolish little woman! Why, you are actually nursing your fears."

"They are scarcely fears; only a stupid sort of foreboding that comes on sometimes, and which, afterward, I look upon as morbid. It is foolish of me, I know, to connect them with Margharita, and yet I can't help it sometimes. She is so like him."

"Why don't you ask her if she knows anything about him, or where he is? Surely you might do that."

"I have made up my mind to more than once, but really, Geoffrey, absurd though it may sound, I have never felt quite at ease in asking Margharita personal questions. She so obviously insists upon our relations remaining exactly those of employer and employed. It was not at all what I intended; but what can I do? I wish to be a friend to her, but her manner quite forbids it. She is far prouder than I am."

Lord St. Maurice shrugged his shoulders and kissed his wife's forehead.

"I shouldn't trouble about it, dear. They are a headstrong, intractable race, those Marionis, and this girl takes after her mother. Treat her kindly and she'll come round some day. Come and sit in the library if you have nothing better to do for half an hour. I have some stupid letters to write."

"I will come in one moment, Geoffrey," she answered. "I may as well clear off some of my correspondence debts. There are some invitations to answer, too."

Lord St. Maurice left the room and Adrienne remained by the window, her eyes fixed upon the little group which had come to a standstill now on the summit of the low line of cliffs. The field glasses were still on the table by her side, and raising them to her eyes, she watched them steadfastly for several minutes. When she put them down she was a shade paler, and there were tears in her eyes.

"If I thought that it would wipe out the past," she murmured, "after all it might be well. But how can it? He will never forgive! Never! never!"

She turned away, brushing the tears from her eyes, and went into her husband's room smiling and comely. Such sorrows as she had were not for him to share—not even for him

to know of. The burden of them was for her alone.

. . . . . .

And, meanwhile, Lord Lumley, her only son, was leaning against the trunk of a pine tree on the brow of the cliff, with something very much like a frown upon his forehead; and a little distance away, Margharita was calmly reading to Gracie out of a French picture book, brought, as Lord Lumley had been quick to surmise, chiefly with a view of excluding him from their company. It was quite true, as his father had remarked, that he had received very little encouragement from Margharita; in fact, he had been told somewhat plainly, a few minutes ago, that his presence was interfering with the lesson. "As if there was any necessity to bring lesson books out of doors," he had muttered *sotto voce,* withdrawing himself a few yards, however, and relapsing into an irritated silence. The book had been brought on his account altogether. There was no doubt whatever about that, and, manlike, he felt aggrieved. Of course he ought to have gone away at once, and he had started with that intention, but the sound of Margharita's voice arrested him before he had gone half a dozen yards. After all, it would be pleasanter to stay and listen.

So he stood there, crumpling up a sprig of heather in his hand, and ostensibly waiting for a shot at a sea gull. He was quite aware that no sea gull was likely to rise anywhere near, and that his gun was unloaded, but the excuse was the only one that had occurred to him at a minute's notice. His real object in remaining was that he might walk home with Margharita when the lesson was over.

The Earl of St. Maurice had been a handsome man in his youth, but his son was handsomer. To the fine Saxon physique of the St. Maurices, in Lord Lumley had been added something of the more delicate beauty of his mother. He had the long limbs and broad shoulders of which a gallery full of St. Maurices boasted, but his features were more delicately formed, and his forehead was higher and more intellectual than any of them.

Yet it had not in any way spoiled him. He had not an atom of conceit or pride of any sort. At college, where he had graduated early, he presented the rare combination of a nobleman's son, a moderate athlete, and a hard reading man. His had been the intellectual set of the whole university, and having the rare gift of attaining an unsought influence over most of those with whom he was brought into contact, he had imparted a distinctly scholarly tone to

the little circle which he had formed. Men of all grades spoke well of him. He was reserved, and he was not a prig; he was consistent to his own ideals, and yet not censorious. He was possessed of an agreeable and even winning manner, and yet he had rather avoided the society of women than otherwise. The consequence was that, at twenty-four, he had the thoughtful intellectual air of a much older man.

The lesson came to an end at last, and the three strolled down toward the house together. Lord Lumley had joined them because there was something which he was determined to say.

"Miss Briscoe," he began, during a momentary halt while they watched a yacht tacking in the bay below, "may I ask you a question?"

"I suppose so," she answered carelessly, without looking at him.

"You are beginning to avoid me."

"Indeed!"

"You brought that wretched book out this morning as an excuse to get rid of me."

"Well, if I did, you should certainly relieve me of the necessity, should you not?"

"You know that you did. And, yesterday morning, if Gracie had not pleaded to stay out a little longer, you would have cut your work short because of my presence."

"Then, if you think so, Lord Lumley, it is clearly your duty to go away, as I reminded you just now."

"Thanks. I wonder why the path of duty is always so disagreeable."

She did not answer him; but, taking Gracie by the hand, turned homeward. He kept his place by her side, heedless of the angry glance which she flashed upon him.

"I want to know why you object to my society so much, Miss Briscoe?" he said presently.

"There are a great many things we want to know in this world which we don't know," she answered. "Where we go to after we die, for instance. We have to be patient, and wait till we find out."

"Then you won't tell me?"

"Why should I? But if you really want to know, the reason is simple enough. I have been used to solitude. I prefer it. If I cannot have it absolutely I can have it comparatively, at any rate."

"With Gracie?"

"Exactly."

"You are complimentary," he laughed.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Why should I not tell the truth when there is nothing to be gained by telling a falsehood?"

He looked at her gravely.

"That sounds cynical, Miss Briscoe."

"I am indifferent as to its sound," she answered. "Hadn't you better go and shoot something?"

He did not notice her suggestion.

"Miss Briscoe, I do not like the way in which we are talking. I——"

"The remedy is obvious," she interrupted haughtily.

"Probably the fault is mine," he continued, calmly ignoring her speech. "I have not been used to talking to girls much. My friends have all been men, and I daresay that I have got into the habit, therefore, of expressing myself clumsily. But what I want to say to you, if you will give me the opportunity, is this: The first few evenings after your arrival here were very pleasant ones indeed—for me. You talked to me, and I found more pleasure in our conversation than I have ever done in anything else in my life. There, that is being frank, is it not? I hoped that we might be friends; indeed, it seemed to me that we were certainly going to be so. I do not wish to offend you by any apparent exaggeration, but I must say that it made a considerable difference to my interest in life. That is putting it mildly. Where you have found the time to read and think so much, of course, I cannot

tell. It is not my business. Only, I know that it makes your companionship very pleasant for me. You see I am trying to be as matter-of-fact as possible—do please give me credit for that. I just want to know why you have altered your manner to me; why we cannot be friends? Will you tell me, please, Miss Briscoe?"

His pleading tone had a manly musical ring in it which was very pleasant to listen to, and in his anxiety for her answer he had stooped down until his dark handsome head nearly touched hers. She drew away impatiently.

"That is impossible," she said coldly.

"And why?"

"If for no other reason, surely the Countess of St. Maurice's governess is no suitable friend for Lord Lumley."

He colored under the intense hauteur of her words.

"You will forgive my saying that that is the first remark which I have heard from you, Miss Briscoe, which has not been in good taste. Good-morning. Good-bye, Gracie."

He turned abruptly along a private path through the pine wood. Margharita and her charge went on up to the house alone.

CHAPTER XXI

A LAND THAT IS LONELIER THAN RUIN

LATE in the afternoon of the same day they met again, and this time really by accident. Since morning a storm had been blowing, but just before sunset the wind and rain had dropped, and an angry sun glared out in its last moments upon the troubled sea. Lord Lumley, tired of struggling with a pile of books and smoking cigarettes, had seen the change from his study window, and seizing his cap and a stick had hurried out to taste the strong salt wind and to watch the cloud effects from the cliffs; and, as he had rounded the corner, he had come face to face with Margharita.

She was standing on the highest point of the cliffs, her skirts blowing wildly around her tall, slim figure, and making strange havoc with her hair. Her face was turned seaward, but at the sound of his footsteps she turned quickly round. His heart beat fast for a moment, and then he remembered their parting earlier in the day.

"I am sorry to have disturbed you," he said coldly, raising his cap. "If I had had the least idea that you were here I would have taken the other path."

He was passing on, but as she made him no answer he glanced up at her face. Then all thought of going vanished. There were glistening tears in her dark eyes, and her lips were quivering.

"Forgive me, Miss Briscoe," he said, springing up to her side. "I was a clumsy idiot, but I was afraid that you would think that I had followed you. May I stay?"

She nodded, and turned her face away from him.

"Yes, stay," she answered softly; "stay and talk to me. Don't think me silly, but I was feeling sad—lonely, perhaps—and you have always spoken so kindly to me, that the change —it was a little too sudden."

"I was a brute," he whispered gently.

The change in her was wonderful. Her voice was soft, and, glancing up at her face, he could see that it was stained with tears. At that moment he felt that he would have given the world to have taken her into his arms and held her there, but he thrust the thought resolutely from him. Now was his opportunity to teach her to trust him. He would not

even suffer his voice to take too tender a note.

"The fresh air is glorious after a day cooped up in a little study," he said lightly. "See the curlews there, flying round and round over the marshes. Tennyson's old home lies that way, you know. Do you wonder that this flat country, with its strange twilight effects, should have laid hold of him so powerfully?"

"It is strange and weird," she murmured thoughtfully.

"Weird is the very word for it. Tennyson might have written that lovely but hackneyed poem, 'Locksley Hall,' from this very spot. The place seems born to evoke sentiment, and a stormy twilight like this seems to fit in with it. It is not a fair-weather land. People come here in the summer, and call the place flat and uninteresting. One can scarcely wonder at it."

"It is a sad-looking country," she said. "It was its sadness which brought me out this afternoon; *similia similibus curantur,* you know; but in my case it has failed."

"And why should you be sad?" he asked softly. "Won't you give me a little of your confidence?"

She smiled bitterly, and shook her head.

"No, you could never know. Ask me no

questions; only leave me alone. Talk to me of other things, if you will. My thoughts are bad companions to-night. I do not want to be left alone with them. Do you know any of Swinburne's 'Salt Marshes'?"

"A little."

"Say it to me. I want to escape from my thoughts."

He obeyed her, standing up by her side and watching the wild music of the poetry kindle her imagination and work into her heart. He understood the situation now. She was oppressed by some great trouble, and he must help her to forget it. And so, when he had come to the last line, he talked to her softly of it, pointing out the strange lights on the sea, and the shadows lying across the desolate country. Soon he drifted into verse again, striving, so far as he could, to avoid the poetry of pessimism and despair, so beautiful and yet so noxious, and strike a more joyous and hopeful note. Soon he found himself at "Maud," and here he was fluent, but here she stopped him, warned perhaps by the light which was creeping into his eyes.

"Let us go home now," she said. "You have been very kind to me. I shall never forget it."

He gave her his hand, and they scrambled

down on to the path. They retraced their steps toward the house almost in silence. He was only fearful of losing one particle of the advantage which he had gained. The fear of not seeing her again, however, gave him courage.

"May I ask a favor?" he begged humbly.

She nodded.

"Make it a small one, please. I am almost afraid of having to refuse it."

"Will you come down into the drawing room to-night?"

She shook her head.

"I cannot. I have a long letter to write."

His face fell.

"For just a short time, then."

She hesitated.

"Yes, if you wish it."

"We are friends now, are we not?" anxiously.

She flashed a brilliant look upon him, which made the color steal into his cheeks, and his heart beat fast.

"Yes," she said softly, "if you will."

CHAPTER XXII

LORD LUMLEY'S CONFESSION

"MOTHER, don't you think that Miss Briscoe is a very strange girl?"

Lady St. Maurice looked up from her work quickly. Nine o'clock was just striking, and her son only a moment before had replaced his watch in his pocket with an impatient little gesture.

"Yes, I do think so," she answered quietly. "I think her very strange indeed. Why do you ask me?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, I don't know exactly.. It seems odd that she should want to spend all her evening alone, and that she should have so many long letters to write. Do you think that she quite understands that you would like her to come down with us?"

"I am quite sure that she does, Lumley. I even objected to having her come here as a governess at all. Her mother was a dear friend of mine many years ago, and I told Margharita from the first that I would rather

have her here as my daughter. She would have been very welcome to a home with us. It was only her pride which made her insist upon coming as Gracie's governess, and I suppose it is the same feeling which prompts her to keep herself so much aloof from us. I am sorry, but I can do no more than I have done toward making her see things differently."

Lord Lumley fidgeted about for a minute or two on the hearthrug. There was a certain reserve in his mother's manner which made the task which he had set himself more difficult even than it would have been under ordinary circumstances. Besides, he felt that from her low seat she was watching him intently, and the knowledge did not tend toward setting him more at his ease.

"You loved her mother, then?"

"I did. She was my dearest friend."

"And yet—forgive me if I am wrong—but sometimes I fancy that you do not even like Miss Briscoe."

"She will not let me like or dislike her, Lumley."

He shook his head.

"It isn't that exactly. I have seen you watching her sometimes—as for instance when she sang that Sicilian song here—as though you were—well, almost afraid of her; as

though there was something about her which almost repelled you."

The Countess laid down her work, and looked steadfastly into the fire. There was a moment's silence.

"You have been a close watcher, Lumley."

"I admit it. But, tell me, have I not watched to some purpose. There is no mistaking the look in your face sometimes, when she comes into the room unexpectedly. If the thing were not absurd, I should say that you were afraid of her."

Lady St. Maurice held her hand to her side for a moment, as though she felt a sudden pain. She repeated her son's words without looking up at him.

"Afraid of her! No, no, Lumley. I am afraid of something else, something of which her face continually reminds me. It is the shadow of the past which seems to follow her footsteps."

A tragic note had suddenly been struck in the conversation between mother and son. Lord Lumley, who had been altogether unprepared for it, was full of interest.

"The past!" he repeated. "Whose past? Tell me all about it, mother."

She looked up at him, and he saw that her face was unusually pale.

"Lumley, it is only a little while ago since your father and I told you the story of our strange meeting and marriage. You remember it?"

"Every word! Every word, mother!"

"You remember the duel which the Count di Marioni sought to force upon your father, but which I prevented? You remember the means which I was driven to use to prevent it, and the oath of vengeance which Leonardo —the Count di Marioni—swore against us both?"

"Yes."

"Lumley, twenty-five years have passed away, and he is free."

"But, Miss Briscoe?" he asked, bewildered. "How does all this concern her?"

"She is his niece."

"His niece! his niece!"

Lord Lumley could say nothing. With all the swift selfishness of a man his thoughts were centered round one point. Would this new development hinder his purpose, or was it favorable to him?

"Leonardo's sister, Lumley, was my dear friend. She married a man named Briscoe, and died very soon afterward. Margharita is their daughter, and, Lumley, there is no English blood in her veins. She is a Marioni!

I can see his eyes and his forehead every time I look at hers. They seem to tell me that that wild oath still lives; that some day he will stretch out his hand and redeem that murderous threat. Lumley, there have been times when it has terrified me to look at that girl."

His face was clearing. A smile even began to dawn upon his lips.

"Why, mother, don't you see that so far as Miss Briscoe is concerned that is all fancy," he said. "You feel in that way toward her simply because she happens to resemble the Count di Marioni. Isn't that a little unfair to her? What can she know of an oath which was sworn five-and-twenty years ago, long before she was born. Why, I don't suppose that she ever heard of it."

She smiled a little sadly.

"Lumley, I do not attempt to defend my feeling. Of course it is absurd to connect her with it, really."

"I was sure that you would say so, mother."

"But, Lumley, although I cannot defend it the feeling remains. Listen. No woman has known greater happiness than I have. My life has been sometimes almost too perfect, and yet I never altogether forgot those passionate words of Leonardo's. They lay like a shadow

across my life, darkening and growing broader as the years of his confinement passed away. The time of his release came at last—only a few months ago, and only a few months ago, Lumley, I saw him."

"You saw him! Where?"

"In London, Lumley! Why did he come, almost on the day of his release, here to England? It was a country which he hated in his younger days, and yet, instead of visiting his old home, his love for which was almost a passion, instead of lingering in those sunny southern towns where many friends still remained who would have received him with open arms, he came straight to London alone. I found him at a hotel there, broken down, and almost, as it were, on the threshold of death! Yet, when he saw me, when he heard my voice, the old passion blazed out. Lumley, I prayed to him for forgiveness, and he scorned me. He had never forgotten! He would never forgive! He pointed to his person, his white hairs, to all the terrible evidences of his long imprisonment, and once more, with the same passion which had trembled in his tone twenty-five years ago, he cursed me! It was horrible! I fled from that place like a haunted woman, and since then, Lumley, I have been haunted. Every feature in the girl's magnifi-

cent face, and every movement of her figure, reminds me that she is a Marioni!"

She had risen and was standing by his side, a beautiful, but a suffering woman. He took her into his arms and kissed her forehead.

"Mother, you have too much imagination," he said gently. "Look at the matter seriously. Granted that this old man still harbors a senseless resentment against you. Yet what could he do? He forgets the days in which he lives, and the country to which you belong! Vendettas and romantic vengeances, such as he may have dreamt of five-and-twenty years ago, are extinct even in his own land; here, they cannot be taken seriously at all!"

She shivered a little, and looked into his face as though comforted in some measure.

"That is what I say to myself, Lumley," she said; "but there are times when the old dread is too strong for me wholly to crush it. I am not an Englishwoman, you know; I come of a more superstitious race!"

"I am sorry that Miss Briscoe should be the means of bringing these unpleasant thoughts to you," he remarked thoughtfully. "Mother!"

"Yes, Lumley."

"Would it be a great trouble to you if—some day—I asked you to receive her as a daughter?"

She stood quite still and shivered. Her face was suddenly of a marble pallor.

"You—you mean this, Lumley?"

"I mean that I care for her, mother."

"You have not—spoken to her?"

"No. I should not have said anything to you yet, only it pained me to think that there was anything between you—any aversion, I mean. I thought that if you knew, you would try and overcome it."

"I cannot!"

"Mother!"

"Lumley, I cannot! She looks at me out of his eyes; she speaks to me with his voice; something tells me that she bears in her heart his hate toward me. You do not know these Marionis! They are one in hate and one in love; unchanging and hard as the rocks on which their castle frowns. Even Margharita herself, in the old days, never forgave me for sending Leonardo to prison, although I saved her lover's life as well as mine. Lumley, you have said nothing to her?"

"Not yet."

"She would not marry you! I tell you that in her heart she hates us all! Sometimes I fancy that she is here—only——"

"Mother!"

He laid his hand firmly upon her white

trembling arm. She looked around, following his eyes. Margharita, pale and proud, was standing upon the threshold, with a great bunch of white hyacinths in the bosom of her black dress.

"Am I intruding?" she asked quietly. "I will come down some other evening."

Lord Lumley sprang forward to stop her; but his mother was the first to recover herself.

"Pray don't go away, Margharita," she said, with perfect self-possession. "Only a few minutes ago we were complaining that you came down so seldom. Lumley, open the piano, and get Miss Briscoe's songs."

He was by her side in a moment, but he found time for an admiring glance toward his mother. She had taken up a paper knife, and was cutting the pages of her book. It was the *savoir-faire* of a great lady.

CHAPTER XXIII

MARGHARITA'S DIARY—A CORRESPONDENCE

Letter from Count Leonardo di Marioni to Miss M. Briscoe, care of the Earl of St. Maurice, Mallory Grange, Lincolnshire.

"HOTEL DE PARIS, TURIN.

"MY BELOVED NIECE: Alas! I have but another disappointment to recount. I arrived here last night, and early this morning I visited the address which I obtained at Florence with so much difficulty. The house was shut up. From inquiries made with caution among the neighbors I learned that Andrea Paschuli had left a few months before for Rome. Thither I go in search of him.

"The delay is irksome, but it is necessary. Although my desire for the day of my vengeance to come is as strong as ever, I would not have the shadow of a suspicion rest upon you. Truly, yours will be no crime, but the world and the courts of justice would have it otherwise. You will, in verity, be but the in-

strument. Upon my head be the guilt, as mine will be the exceeding joy, when the thing for which I crave is accomplished. Bless you, my child, that you have elected to aid me in carrying out this most just requital! Bless you, my child, that you have chosen to bring peace into the heart of one who has known great suffering!

"Your last letter was short; yet I do not wonder at it. What is there you can find to say to me, while our great purpose remains thus in abeyance? My health continues good, I am thankful to say, yet, were it otherwise, I know that my strength would linger with me till my oath is accomplished. Till that day shall come death itself has no power over me. Even though its shadow lay across my path I could still defy it. Think not that I am blaspheming, Margharita, or that I believe in no God. I believe in a God of justice, and he will award me my right. Oh, that the time may be short, for I am growing weary. Life is very burdensome, save only for its end.

"Sometimes, my beloved Margharita, you have sought to lighten the deep gloom through which I struggle, by picturing the happy days we may yet spend together in some far-distant country, where the shadows of this great selfish world barely reach, and its mighty roar and

tumult sound but as a faint, low murmur. I have listened, but I have answered not; for in my heart I know that it will never be. Those days will never come. I have shrunk from throwing a chill upon your warm, generous heart; but of late I have wondered whether I do well in thus silently deceiving you. For, Margharita, there is no such time of peaceful happiness in store for me. I am dying! Nay, do not start! Do not pity me! Do not fear! I know it so well; and I feel no pang, no sorrow. The limit of my days is fixed—not in actual days or weeks, but by events. I shall live to see my desire accomplished, and then I shall die. The light may flicker, but, till then, it will not go out. You will ask me: Who am I that I dare to fix a limit to an existence which God alone controls? I cannot tell you, Margharita, why I know, or how, yet it is surely so. The day which sees me free of my vow will also be the day of my death.

"Trouble not, my child, at this thought, nor wonder why I can write of the end of my days so calmly. Ask yourself rather what further life could mean for me. There is no joy which I desire; my worn-out frame could find no pleasure in dragging out a tasteless and profitless existence. I look for death as one looks for his couch who has toiled and labored

through the heat of the day. I shall find there rest and peace. I have no other desire.

"For yourself, Margharita, have no fear. I have made your fortune my care, and God grant that it may be a happy one. Honest men have made good profit out of my lands during my imprisonment. I have wealth to leave, and it is yours. The Castle of the Marionis will be yours, and well I know you will raise once more and uphold the mighty, though fallen, traditions of our race. I leave all fearlessly in your hands, at your entire disposal. Only one thing I beg of you, and that without fear of refusal. Marry not an Englishman. Marry one of the nobility of our own island, if you can find one worthy of you; if not, there are nobles of Italy with whom your alliance would be an honor, and also a profit. You will be rich as you are beautiful; and the first lady in Italy, our distant kinswoman, Angela di Carlotti, will be your guardian and your friend. May you be very, very happy, dearest; and all that comes to you you will deserve, for you have lightened the heart of a weary old man, whose blessing is yours, now and for ever.

"LEONARDO DI MARIONI."

Letter from Margharita Briscoe to the Count Leonardo di Marioni, care of the Princess di Carlotti, Palazzo Carlotti, Rome.

"My dear, dear Uncle: I am inclined to scold you for your letter, for it made me very sad. Why should you be so sure of dying just as the vengeance which is your due becomes yours? You are not very old, and I can nurse you even as I did before. Think how lonely I should be without you. No, you must not think of leaving me. I forbid it! It is morbid. Banish that fancy for my sake, and try and think of a quiet happy life together, away in some southern city, where the sea and the sky are blue, and the sun is warm, and the breezes are soft and laden with the perfume of sweet flowers. We would never live in this country, would we? I do not like it. It is cold and damp, and it chills me, chills even my heart. Oh! I know just the life we could live together, and be very, very happy. Write to me no more of death.

"I am quite settled down here, waiting. My duties are light, and I do not find them irksome. Every day I realize that I did well in coming here as a governess, and not as one seeking a home. They think that it is because of my

pride that I have willed it so. They do not know.

"Lady St. Maurice tries to be kind to me in her way; but when the honeyed words are upon her lips, I think of you and my heart is steel. She must have been a very beautiful woman—nay, she is beautiful now! You asked me in your first letter to watch well and to tell you whether they were happy together. You asked me, and I tell you the truth.

"Yes! I think that of all the women whom I have ever seen, her life seems to have flown along the most calmly and peacefully. I have never seen a cloud upon her brow; I hate her for it. She has no right to be happy; she who by such treachery condemned you to a living death. Once my anger rose up so fiercely that I nearly struck her, and I had to hurry from the room lest I should betray myself before the time. Truly she deserves punishment, and my hand shall not shrink from inflicting it.

"Yet, after all, is death the most complete form of punishment. Sometimes I doubt it. I would mar the beauty of her face for ever, and laugh. I would strike her blind gladly; I would make her a cripple for life, without remorse, without hesitation. To see her suffer would please me. I should have no pity!

"But death, uncle! If anything of our religion be true, would death be so terrible a thing? Against my will I see that her life is good. She has made her home what it should be, and her husband happy. She is a devoted Christian, and, wet or fine, every Sunday morning before breakfast, she goes to the little church in the village and kneels before the altar. She visits the sick and the poor, and they love her. For me, religion has become something of a dream. I was brought up a Roman Catholic. What I am now I do not know! When I vowed my life to its present purpose I filled it with new thoughts; I put my religion away from me. I could not kneel with hate in my heart; I could not confess, with the desire to kill in my bosom.

"Yet let that pass. Supposing there be a heaven, if we kill her for her treachery to you will not that sin be wiped out? May she not gain heaven? And if so, what of our vengeance? Death is swift! What will she suffer? It will be those who are left behind who will feel the pain; for her, there will be a happiness beyond even the happiness of earth. She will be shriven of her sin by our vengeance.

"Think of this, my dear uncle! Do not imagine that I am growing faint-hearted; do

not imagine that I am drawing back from the task which I now claim as my right. Death, or some other sort of punishment, shall surely fall upon her; she shall not escape! Only think what is best.

"Write to me all that is in your heart. Fear not to speak out! I would know all. Farewell! Your loving MARGHARITA."

Letter from the Count Leonardo di Marioni, the Palazzo Carlotti, Rome, to Miss Margharita Briscoe, Mallory Grange, Lincolnshire.

"BELOVED MARGHARITA: I will confess that your letter troubles me. If there be heaven for the woman who wrecked my life, there is no heaven for me, no religion, no God. You say that she is a good woman. She is then a good woman through fear. She seeks to atone, but she can never atone. She won a boy's passionate love; she wore his heart upon her sleeve; she cast it away at the moment of her pleasure. She broke the vows of an order, which should have been as sacred to her as the face of God to the angels; and she sent a Marioni to rot through a useless life in a miserable prison. The boy whose heart she broke, and the man whose life she severed, lives only to nurse his

unchanging and unchangeable hate for her. Away with all other thoughts, my vengeance knows but one end, and that is death! Not sudden death, mind! but death—slow, lingering, and painful. I would see the struggle against some mysterious sickness, with my own eyes; I would stand by the bedside and mock. I would watch the cheeks grow thin and pale, and the eyes grow dim. She should know me in those last moments. She should see me, the wasted shadow of a man, myself on the threshold of the grave, standing by her bedside, cold and unpitying, and holding out toward her a white hyacinth.

"That is how I would have it, though thus it may not be. Yet speak to me not of any other vengeance save death. Let none other dwell for a moment in your thoughts, I solemnly charge you, Margharita.

"As to my search, it has not yet, alas, been successful. Think not that I have lost heart, or that I am discouraged. Never fear but that I shall find the man whom I seek—if not, there are others. I give myself one month longer; at the end of that time, if Paschuli be not found, another must serve my purpose.

"The Princess is much interested in you, and sends her love. She is impatient to take you

under her care. I have told her that it will not be long—nor will it.

"Farewell, my child. Soon I shall send you the good news.—Yours,

"LEONARDO DI MARIONI."

CHAPTER XXIV

"WHITE HYACINTHS"

I AM driven to what is either the vehicle for the sentimental vaporings of a school girl, or the last resource of a desperate, friendless woman. I am going to set down on blank paper the record of events here just in the way they occur to me. I am going to enjoy the luxury of being honest to myself. I need not say in which of the above states I am. That is soon shown.

I would to God that I had died before I had come here; before I had sought out my uncle, Count Marioni, and listened to the pitiful story of his wrongs. I am pledged to a purpose so awful that I dare not think of it. Day by day I am expecting the time to arrive for the accomplishment of my hideous vow. God keep it back! Keep me innocent a little longer!

I write this in a weak moment. There are times when my uncle's wistful eyes seem turned upon me, full of mute pleading, and the old spirit of my race stirs up a great passion of hate in my heart. Then the thing

seems easy; I long for a weapon that I may end the struggle, and avenge the man who looks to me to strike. Her gentle manners and kind words have no influence. I am adamant. I look across the sea, and I see the figure of a man, pale and lonely, languishing year by year in a Roman prison. Then, indeed, my heart is hard and my hand is ready!

But there are other times, such as these, when I loathe myself and the part I am playing; when an unutterable horror comes upon me, and I see myself and my purpose in hideous, ghastly colors. It is such a mood that has driven me to make use of this dumb confidant, that I may confess what this thing is which has dawned upon me. My cheeks are stained with shame as I write it. Never could it have passed my lips. Oh! my love, my love, cursed am I that I love you!

He shall never know it! He thinks me cold and capricious! Let him! It is my purpose to make him suffer, and he shall suffer! In that I will be true to my oath; I will make of this weakness a scourge! No one will know what it costs me! No one will know how sweet to me are the words which I train my lips to answer with scorn! Never a tender look or word shall he gain from me; yet this much can I promise myself. No one else

shall ever be dear to me! No other lover will I have save his memory! He thinks that I dislike him! He shall think so to the end! He shall never know—never!

I took up a novel this morning, and tried to read, but could not. Ah! those fools who write about a woman's love—what do they know about it? Nothing! less than nothing! I, Margharita, am nineteen years old, and I love! I would die this moment cheerfully, sooner than he should know it! Yet, though I shall never hear one word of love from his lips, or rest for one moment in his arms; though I live to be an old woman, I would starve, beg, die, sooner than give myself to any other man. To have loved, even though the love be unknown, and to have been loved, even though it be silently, is sweet to a woman. She can crystallize the memory in her heart and pass through life sad, perhaps, yet content, cold and deaf to all other voices. They say that a man is not like this. Perhaps! A woman's nature is finer than a man's—less passionate, but more devoted.

To-night, as the dressing bell rang, and I was coming upstairs to change my gown for dinner, he met me in the hall and offered me—a spray of white hyacinths! How my fingers shook as I took them! White hyacinths! If

he had only known what he had been doing. White hyacinths! What was that oath—"Vengeance upon traitors." Does she remember it, I wonder? I think that she does, for I wore them in the bosom of my dress, and she turned pale when she glanced at them. She looked at me as though she were afraid. Does my face remind her of the past, I wonder? She told me that my features are the features of the Marionis, and I know that I am like my mother! I am glad of it! I would have my face bring a pang to her heart every time she looks at it. That is justice!

She looked, as though fascinated, at the bunch of white flowers in my bosom. I took care to let her know that Lord Lumley had given them to me. I am never so gracious to him as in her presence.

"By the by, mother," he said, during a pause in the conversation, "I have noticed that, while you use every other color of hyacinths for table decorations, you never use any white ones. Why is it?"

She looked at her husband. I saw their eyes meet across the table, and that look told me how near the past was to their thoughts.

"It is a flower I do not care for, Lumley," she said quietly. "The perfume is too faint. Besides, they are so suggestive of funerals."

"Perhaps you would prefer my not wearing mine, then," I remarked carelessly. "I will throw them away."

I saw him bite his lip and frown, and I laughed to myself. Lady St. Maurice was hesitating.

"I should be sorry for you to do that," she said. "Groves can take them away until after dinner, if you would not mind."

"They are scarcely worth keeping," I went on, drawing them from my corsage. "I care nothing for them after all," and opening the window just behind my chair, I threw them into the darkness.

Lord Lumley came to me in the drawing room afterward.

"It was scarcely kind of you to throw my flowers away," he said, bending over my chair.

I turned back with my hands clasped behind my head and laughed up at him.

"Why not? They were nothing to me. It was kind to your mother at any rate."

Oh! hypocrite! hypocrite! If he could only have seen me a few minutes before, stealing along in the shadow of the shrubs outside looking about in the darkness till I had found them, and holding them passionately to my lips. They were in my pocket then, wrapped in a lace handkerchief. They are in a secret

drawer of my desk now, and there will they remain forever. I do not mind confessing that they are very precious to me. But he does not know that.

He turned away offended and left me. But I went to the piano and sang a wild Neapolitan love song, and when I had finished he was leaning over me with a deep glow in his pale cheeks and his eyes fixed upon mine. Does he know how handsome he is, I wonder? Whence did I get the strength to look into those deep blue eyes, burning with passion, and mock at him?

"You sing divinely of what you know nothing!" he said.

"Isn't that rather a rash assumption?" I answered lightly. "You are paying me a poor compliment in taking it for granted that I never had a lover, Lord Lumley."

"Have you?"

"Oh, yes, heaps!"

"Are you engaged, then?" he asked fiercely.

"How like a man you jump at conclusions!"

"But, are you?"

"Is it your business, Lord Lumley?"

"Yes!"

"Then if you make everybody's love affairs your concern, you must find plenty to interest you."

"There is only one person in the world in whose love affairs I am interested."

"Naturally!" I answered. "Whose else should be so interesting as your own?"

"I did not mean that!" he exclaimed, almost angrily. "You are bandying words with me."

"On the contrary, it is you who seem bent on mystifying me," I answered, laughing.

"You shall hear me speak more plainly then."

"I would rather not. Enigmas are so much more interesting. Will you allow me to pass?"

"Why," he asked, without moving an inch.

"Because, as your mother does not seem to be coming in again, I should prefer going to my room."

"She is coming in again. I heard her order coffee here in ten minutes."

"I don't want any coffee, and I won't be kept here. Lord Lumley, be so good as to allow me to pass."

"In one minute, Margharita. I——"

"Lord Lumley, I allow no man to call me by my Christian name without permission."

"Then give me permission."

"Never!"

"You don't mean that?"

"I do! Lord Lumley, allow me to pass. I will not be kept here against my will!"

He caught hold of my wrist, but I snatched my hand away.

"Margharita, listen! I love you. Why should you be angry? I want you to be my wife."

I believe he thought that I was won. I had sunk down upon the music stool and covered my face with my hands. My bosom was heaving with sobs. With all my strength I was battling with a strange bewildering succession of feelings. In reality I was more exquisitely and perfectly happy than I had ever dreamed of.

I felt his strong hands close over my fingers and remove them one by one. His head was quite close to mine, and suddenly I felt his mustache brush my cheek.

I sprang to my feet, wildly, fiercely angry. My eyes were flashing, and I had drawn myself up until I seemed almost as tall as he was. If he had dared to kiss me. Oh! if he had dared!

"Let me pass!" I cried passionately. "Let me pass at once, I say."

He fell back immediately. He was half frightened, half puzzled.

"Lord Lumley, I never wish you to speak to me again," I cried, trembling all over with passionate indignation, and dashing the tears from

my eyes. "I hate you. Do you hear! I hate you!"

He ought to have been abashed, but he was not.

"You have no cause to hate me!" he said proudly. "Surely a man does not insult a woman by offering her his love, as I have offered you mine. I scarcely see at least how I have deserved your anger."

Suddenly his voice broke down, and he went on in a very altered tone:

"Oh, Margharita, my love, my love! Give me one word of hope! Tell me at least that you are not really angry with me."

And then, without a moment's warning, the fire of indignation which had leaped up to help me suddenly died out. He was standing respectfully away from me, pale and dignified. His face was full of emotion, and his hands were trembling; but some instinct seemed to have told him how I hated his touch, and he did not attempt even to hold my hand. Oh! that moment, terrible as it was at the time, will be very sweet to think upon in after days.

My strength had come to an end. I knew that I was in terrible risk of undoing all that I had done, but I could not help it. That moment seemed somehow sacred. Although my whole life was itself a lie, I could not then

have looked in his eyes and spoken falsely. If I had let him see my face, though only for an instant, he would have known my secret; so I buried it in my hands, and swept from the room before he could stop me.

Am I more happy or more miserable, I wonder, since he has spoken those words which seem to be ever ringing in my ears? Both, I think! Life is more intense; it has other depths now besides that well of hate and pity which has brought me into this household. At any rate, I have felt emotions to-night which I never dreamed of before.

If only he knew—knew all, how he would scorn, hate, despise me! How he would hasten to drive me out of his memory, to crush every tender thought of me, to purge his heart of love for me, to pluck it up by the roots and cast it away forever! Would he find it an easy task, I wonder? Perhaps. He loves his mother so much. Why should he not? So far as he is concerned, she deserves it. She is a good mother, and a good wife. If it were not for the past I would call her a good woman. Sometimes I wish that she were not so, that she was still vain and heartless, the same woman who, for the sake of an alien and a stranger, brought down a living death upon the man who had trusted her

with his most sacred secrets; and that man the last of the Marionis, my uncle. I think of it, and coldness steals once more into my heart. What she is now is of no account. It is the past for which she must suffer.

CHAPTER XXV

AMONG THE PINE TREES

THIS morning I heard noises about the house quite early and heavy footsteps in the drive. I was awake—it was only a few minutes since I had been sitting at the window watching the day break over the sea, and I had the curiosity to look out. I think that something must have told me what it meant, for my heart sank even before I had any idea of what was going on. There were two sailors from Lord Lumley's yacht in the bay, carrying great hampers down from the house. I guessed it all in a moment; he was going away.

I put on my dressing-gown and sat down in a low chair to watch. Through a chink in the blind I could keep it lowered and still see quite plainly. Presently I saw him appear in his yachting clothes, with oilskins on his arm. Would he glance up at all, I wondered. Yes; at the bend in the shrubbery he turned and looked for a full minute up at my window. It was all I could do to keep from waving him to come back. How pale he was, and how

dejected his walk seemed. My eyes grew dim, and there was a lump in my throat as he turned and walked away. Would it have made any difference, I wonder, if he had known of my being there; if he could have seen my poor, sad, tear-stained face? I think that it would.

He has gone. I have seen the last of him. Am I glad or sorry, I wonder. Glad that my task has become so much easier, or sorry for my own unreasoning, selfish sake. Why should I be a hypocrite? These pages are to be the mirror of my heart. To others my whole life is a lie. I write here so that I may retain some faint knowledge of what truth really is. I am sorry—desperately, foolishly sorry. I know that my cheeks are leaden, and my heart is heavy. There is no light in the day; none of that swift, keen struggling with myself which his presence always imposed. He is gone, and I miss them; I should have laughed a few short days ago to have believed this true. But it is true!

The first bell has gone, and I have drawn up my blind. The promise of that blood-red sunrise has been fulfilled. I wish that he had waited another day. I have an idea that there is going to be a storm. There is a pale yellow light in the sky which I do not like, and, as far as one can see, the waves are crested with white

foam. It is an ugly sea and an ugly sky. I wish that I were going with him, and that a storm might come and we might die together. I would not mind his holding me in his arms then. We would die like that, and death would be joy.

At breakfast I was able to take the news of his departure without making any sign. I fancy that Lady St. Maurice was watching me when she made the announcement. If she was expecting to read my thoughts and fears she was disappointed. She could have seen nothing but the most utter indifference. I felt that my mask was perfect.

But as the day wore on my task grew harder. The wind, which had been blowing hard all the morning, became a hurricane, and even in the house, with closed doors and windows, we could hear the far-off thunder of the sea sweeping in against the cliffs. Every one in the household became strangely restless and anxious. Lord St. Maurice, with a field glass under his arm, went out upon the cliffs, and he returned hatless and with his coat ripped up, shaking his head with ill-affected cheerfulness. There was no sign of the *Stormy Petrel.*

"Lumley would make for Yarmouth harbor directly he saw this beast of a gale blowing up," he declared, walking up and down the morning

room with troubled face. "He is a little careless, but he is an excellent sailor, and he must have seen that there was dirty weather brewing. It isn't as though it were a sudden squall, you know, or anything of that sort. There was plenty of warning. All the same, I wish he hadn't started. It was very foolish, and I don't like such whims. I didn't hear him say anything about a cruise yesterday. Did you, Adrienne?"

Was it my fancy, or did Lady St. Maurice indeed glance at me as she answered:

"No, I heard nothing. Late last night he came to my room and told me that he had given Groves some orders, and that he should leave quite early this morning."

Lord St. Maurice frowned.

"It is most extraordinary," he said. "He gave you no reason whatever, then?"

"None!"

"Did he say where he was going to? We were shooting together all yesterday afternoon, and he said not a word about going away. On the contrary, he arranged to go to Norwich on Thursday to look at some horses."

The Countess shook her head.

"I know no more than you do, Geoffrey. I asked him where he was going, and he did not seem at all sure. He said that he would write

if he remained away more than a day or two. You know how uncertain he is."

"It is very inconsiderate of him," Lord St. Maurice declared, leaving the room abruptly. "I am surprised at Lumley."

Lady St. Maurice and I were alone. She was pretending to read and I to work. So far as she was concerned, I could see that it was a pretence, for she held her book upside down, and for my part, I did not make a correct stitch. I knew that I ought to have been calm, that I was imperiling my secret every moment. When at last she spoke to me, I made a great effort to control my tone.

"Lord Lumley said nothing to you, I suppose, Margharita, about going away?"

"Nothing whatever," I answered quietly. "He would be scarcely likely to mention his plans to me and not to you or Lord St. Maurice."

I was forced to look up, and I met her eyes fixed upon me with a look which I had seen there once or twice before. It was almost a look of fear, as though she saw in my face something which aroused a host of sad, dimly-veiled memories. Was she wondering whether the presence of a Marioni in her house boded ill-fortune to herself and those who were dear to her? It may have been so.

She did not answer immediately, and I took advantage of the pause to leave the room. I could not bear to talk to her.

Ought I not to have been glad at all this—to have watched her pale, suffering face with satisfaction, and even with inward joy. Was she not in trouble greater than any I could bring upon her, and, indeed, had I not had a hand in it? Was it not I who had driven her son out into this danger? Should I not have rejoiced? Alas! alas! how could I, when my own heart was beating fast in a very agony of sickening fear.

My little pupil was away for the day—gone to play with the clergyman's children down in the village, and my time was my own. I was thankful, for I could not possibly have forced myself into the wearisome routine of lesson hearing and teaching. Solitude was my only relief.

The day wore on. Servants had been sent to every point along the coast, and the harbor master at Yarmouth had been telegraphed to every hour. I stood by my window, looking out in the fast gathering twilight, until I could bear it no longer. Dashing the tears from my face, I caught up a thick cloak, and running softly down the back stairs, left the house unobserved.

At first I could scarcely stand, and, indeed, as I turned the corner of the avenue and faced the sea, a gust of wind carried me off from my feet, and I had to cling to the low iron railings for support. The thunder of the storm and the waves seemed to shake the air around me. The sky was dark and riven with faint flashes of stormlight, which slanted down to the sea. By hard struggling I managed to make my way on to the cliffs, and stood there, looking downward, with my arm passed round a tall fir sapling for support. What a night it was! The spray of the waves breaking against the cliff leaped up into my face mingled with the blinding rain, and dimmed my vision so that I could only catch a faint view of the boiling, seething gulf below. Beyond, all was chaos; for a gray haze floated upon the water and met the low hanging clouds. And clear above the deep thunder of the sea came the shrill yelling of the wind in the pine groves which fringed the cliffs, sounding like the demoniacal laughter of an army of devils. Shall I ever forget the horror of that day, I wonder! I think not! It is written upon a page of my memory in characters over which time can have no power.

And in that moment of agony, when my thoughts were full of his peril, I wrestled no

longer with my secret; I knew that I loved him. I knew that he was dear to me as no other man could be. I knew that I was face to face with a misery unchanging and unending.

Were not the fates themselves fighting against me in my task? That it should be, of all men upon this earth, he, the son of the woman whose death would be at my door. A murderess! Should I be that! The wind caught up the word which had burst from my pale lips, and I seemed to hear it echoed with fiendish mirth among the bending tree tops of the plantation. A murderess! and of his mother, the mother whom he loved so fondly! If he should know it! If the day should come when my sin should be laid bare, and he should know that he had given his love to such a one. Sin! Was it a sin? Was my love turning the whole world upside down? Had it seemed so to me before? Was it sin or justice! Oh! to whom should I look for strength to hold me to my purpose. To pray would be blasphemous. For me there was no God, no friend on earth, no heaven! I could only think of that one shattered life, and hug it to my memory.

I wandered backward and forward in the storm, drenched and cold, yet all unmindful of

my state. I could have borne no roof over my head in those hours of my agony. The thought of his danger maddened me. Even though I knew so well that he could be nothing to me; that if he knew the truth, he would loathe me; that soon the day would come when I should scarcely dare to raise my eyes to his before we parted forever. All these things seemed to make me long the more passionately to look once more into his face, to know that he was safe. It was my fault that he was in this danger. Horrible thought!

I was exhausted; worn out in body and mind by the sickening fears which no effort of will seemed able to quell. Even my limbs at last gave way beneath me, and I sank upon my knees, holding my face in my hands. Had the edge of the cliff been a little nearer, could I have done it without any physical effort, I had been content to close my eyes, and throw myself into the sea. If there are no joys in death, at least there is rest.

Then a voice came to me.

"Margharita!"

I leaped up from the wet ground with wildly-beating heart. Was it some mocking trick of the storm—that voice in my ears, that dear, dear voice? My eyes seemed dilated, and through the deep gloom I saw a tall figure

striding toward me. Then I know that I cried out and called to him by his name; and alas! by the tone of my voice, and the light that flashed into my face, my secret was gone! For evil or for good he knew then that I loved him!

CHAPTER XXVI

STORMS

THERE came a time then of blessed and grateful unconsciousness. The tumult of the storm was reduced to a mere singing in my ears, and darkness seemed to have closed in around me. When I opened my eyes, I was resting in his arms, and a delicious sense of happiness was stealing through me. Sensation had overpowered memory, and I was happy. Ah! if life could have ended then—that was how I felt. If only the future and that shrunken relentless figure pointing me on to tragedy—if only they could have melted away! Alas! alas!

He had become bold at my mute self-yielding, and at something which he must have seen in my face. I felt him bending down over me, and suddenly my lips partly opened to frame the feeblest of protests were closed in a long passionate kiss, and his arms drew me toward him. Still I made no effort to release myself. A desperate self-abandonment had crept in upon me. The happiness of that moment should

recompense me for the misery to come. Time took to itself wings then; I had no power or will to measure it. If hell itself had been yawning at my feet, I was content.

It was he who spoke at last, still clasping my hands, and looking eagerly into my face.

"Margharita, my love, I have come back to you. How shall I bless this storm!"

"Have you been in danger?" I asked softly.

"Nothing to speak of," he laughed. "We ran for Yarmouth harbor directly we saw what was coming, and only lost a few spars. What a sea it was, though. Wave after wave broke over our bows and swept the deck. It was a miracle we lost no men."

"And how is it that you are home so quickly?"

"I took the first train from Yarmouth, and wired for a special from the junction. I knew that my mother would be anxious, and they told me that there was very little chance of telegrams being delivered safely; so much damage had been done to the wires."

"You thought of no one but your mother?" I whispered, a little reproachfully.

"My darling! how was I to know that any one else cared?"

"Ah!"

The sense of relief in my heart was over-

powering. I seemed to have no desire for speech. The sound of his voice was like music to me, and I preferred to listen.

"It seems to me that I have had no thought save of you, Margharita," he went on slowly. "In all that storm, when flying clouds and spray and driving rain shut us in on every side, I thought of nothing else save of you. No one knows the boat so well as I, and for the last four hours I was lashed to a board, steering. Margharita, all that time, and all the time I stood on the bridge, I seemed to see you always. Sometimes it was the mist of rain and spray which opened to let you through; and sometimes—sometimes I almost fancied that you were by my side. Think of you, Margharita! Why, I was a haunted man. In all that thunder of sea and wind, when I had to use a speaking trumpet to make my men hear me a few yards away, I could only hear your voice in my ears as distinctly as you hear me now. They say that when one is in danger, or near death, that the imagination is quickened. It must have been so with me, for your presence and the sound of your voice were very real to me."

"How did you find me here?" I asked.

"Well, as soon as I could decently get away from my people, I asked for you. They sent

to your room, and could not find you. Then one of the servants thought that she had seen you leave the house and come this way. So I started off in search."

"It was foolish of me to come out. I could not rest indoors."

"Why?" eagerly.

"The storm was so dreadful."

"And so you came out into it. A bad reason. Was there no other?"

"I was anxious, too, I think. I wanted to see what the sea looked like."

"Why were you anxious; what about?"

"Somebody was in danger."

"My darling!"

His lips met mine again. My strength seemed altogether gone. I made no effort to escape.

"I didn't say who 'somebody' was," I protested weakly.

He laughed gaily.

"But I know."

"Sure?"

"Quite sure."

"I may have relatives who are sailors."

"You may have, but you haven't."

I considered for a moment.

"It was purely a matter of responsibility, you know. I felt that I had something to do with

your going away. I was disagreeable last night, and you were offended. See?"

"Not a bit."

"You are very stupid."

"I am not now; I was last night."

"What do you mean?"

"I will answer you by asking a question. Will you promise to reply to it?"

"*Cela dépend.* I won't be rash."

"Do you care for me—just a little?" he asked, tenderly but hopefully.

Oh, horrible! A vision seemed to float suddenly before my eyes. The darkness faded away, to be replaced by a little white-washed chamber in a distant land. I saw an old man dying, with his eyes fixed upon me full of mute reproach, his trembling fingers pointed at me with scorn, and his lips framing a feeble curse. Suddenly his look changed, his arm fell, his face grew suddenly bright and joyful, and the curse changed into a fervent blessing. Then the room widened, and the little figure under that spotless coverlet faded away. It was a chamber in a palace, and I saw Lady St. Maurice, also on her death-bed. Her husband and her son knelt by her side with bared heads, and the air was laden and heavy with the sound of their sobs. She alone did not weep, and her pale, spiritualized face glowed like the face

of a martyred saint. And as I watched I seemed to hear one word constantly escaping from those who watched by her side, and caught up and echoed a thousand times by the sad wailing wind until it rang in my ears unceasingly—and the word was "Murderess!"

It passed away—vanished in a phantom of mist, like some weird morbid fancy, but the joy of those last few minutes was quenched. I drew myself from his arms, and pressed my hand to my side. There was a sharp pain there.

"We must go back to the house," I said. "I have been a little mad, I think, and I am very wet."

He looked at me, amazed.

"Won't you answer my question first?" he pleaded. "Margharita, make me very happy. Be my wife."

His wife. Oh, the grim grotesque agony of it all. My strength would never be sufficient to carry me through all this. My heart was faint, and my speech was low; yet it was as cold and resolute as I could make it.

"Never! never! I would sooner die than that. Let us go back at once—at once!"

He caught me by the wrist, and forced me to look into his face. It was unwise of him to

touch me against my will, for the fire flashed into my eyes, and my anger gave me strength.

"Margharita, what does this mean? You do care for a me a little, don't you?"

"No!"

I lied, God knows, and all in vain.

"Perhaps not so very much now," he said, with a little sigh, "but you will some day. I know that you will. Be generous, Margharita, give me a little hope."

I laid my hand upon his arm. How could I convince him. Anger, lies, reasoning, all seemed so weak and ineffective; and he was so strong—strong in his own love, strong unconsciously in mine.

"Lord Lumley, I can only give you one answer, and that is—'No.' Nothing can change me. I would sooner throw myself from these cliffs than become your wife."

He considered for a moment, while I watched him anxiously.

"I have a right to know your reason for that speech," he said in a low but firm tone. "Give me your hands for one moment, Margharita—so! Now, look me in the eyes, and tell me that you do not care for me!"

I was a fool to try. I might have known that, after all I had passed through that day, it was beyond my strength. I got as far as

the first three words, and then I burst into tears. His whole face lit up with joy at my failure.

"I am satisfied!" he said, drawing my hand through his arm. "Come! we will go back to the house. I must not have you catch cold!"

He spoke with an air of fond proprietorship which made my heart tremble, but I had no more words left with which to fight my battle. My strength was gone; I did not even try to withdraw my hand.

We walked away, and I did my best to choke the hysterical sobs which threatened me. Directly we left the shelter of the pine grove, speech became impossible. We had to fight our way along, step by step, with the wind and rain beating in our faces. I was thankful for it, for the physical effort seemed to stimulate and calm me.

When at last we reached the house and stood inside the hall, he turned to me and spoke for the first time.

"That walk was quite an event, wasn't it? Let me feel how wet you are."

He ran his fingers down my arm and back, and then rang the hall bell violently.

"You are wet through," he said gravely. "And it is my fault. Instead of bringing you home at once, as I ought to have done,

I kept you out there talking. Run upstairs at once, Margharita, please, and change all your things. I will send up hot water."

He had been hurrying me to the stairs all the time, and I began slowly to ascend them. He stood down in the white stone hall, watching me anxiously.

"You won't be long, will you?" he said, as I reached the corner. "I want to talk to you before dinner."

I answered him mechanically, and turning away, went along the corridor to my room, and flung myself upon the bed. I had scarcely been there five minutes when there was a knock at the door.

"Who is there?" I asked, sitting up and hastily drying my eyes.

A servant's voice answered, and I recognized Cecile, the Countess's own maid.

"Her ladyship has sent you a cup of tea, miss, and hopes you will be sure to change all your clothes. There is a letter for you, too, miss."

I bade the girl come in and put the tea down. When she had gone, I stretched out my hand, and took up the letter with trembling fingers. It was from my uncle, and the postmark was Rome.

CHAPTER XXVII

A LIFE IN THE BALANCE

I SUPPOSE it is absurd to talk about presentiments, and yet I knew what was in that letter. As plainly as though I saw it written up in characters of fire, I knew its contents and my doom. The climax of all things was at hand. The time was approaching when I must keep my vow, or confess myself foresworn—an unworthy daughter of the Marionis. It was a bitter choice, for there was a life in either balance; the life of this traitress of five-and-twenty years ago, or of an old man sick to the heart with disappointment; deceived by a woman in his youth, and a woman again in his old age.

I bathed my eyes and face, and, throwing off my wet things, wrapped myself in a dressing robe. Then I poured out a cup of tea and drank it over the fire. All the while that letter lay before me on the tray, face upward, and my eyes kept straying unwillingly toward it. It had a sort of fascination for me, and in the end it conquered. I had meant to give myself

a few hours' more freedom—to have put it away until bedtime, but a sudden impulse came to me, and I yielded. I caught it up with firm fingers and tore it open.

"PALEZZO CARLOTTI, ROME.

"MARGHARITA,—Beloved. Success! success! My search is over, my purpose is accomplished. I have found Paschuli. Enclosed in this letter you will find a smaller envelope. It contains the powder.

"Can you wonder that my hand is shaking, and that there is a mist before my eyes! I am an old man, and great joy is hard to bear; harder still after a weary, wretched life such as mine. You will understand, though—you will be able to decipher this faint, uncertain handwriting, and you will forgive me if it tires you. Ay, you will do that, Margharita, I know!

"Let me tell you how I found him. It was by the purest accident. I turned aside into an old curio shop to buy some trifle for you which took my fancy, and it was Paschuli himself who served me. Thus you see how indirectly even your star always shines over mine and leads me aright. If it had not been for you I should never have dreamed of entering the place, but I thought of you and your taste for Roman

jewelry, and behold, I found myself in the presence of the man for whom I was making vain search. My Margharita! my good angel! I have you to thank even for the successful accomplishment of my part in that edict of our Order which you and I are banded together to carry out.

"At first, Paschuli did not recognize me, and it was long before I could make him believe that I was indeed that most unfortunate of men, Leonardo di Marioni. But when he was convinced, he promised me what I sought. That same evening he gave it to me.

"Margharita, there is no poison in the world like that which I send you in this letter. The merest grain of it is sufficient, in wine or water, or food of any sort. There is no art of medicine which could detect it—no means by which the death, which will surely follow, can be averted; so you run no risk, my child! Bide your time, and then—then!

"Margharita, I am coming to you. Nay, do not be alarmed, I run no risk. I shall come disguised, and no one will know me, but I must see something of the end with my own eyes, or half its sweetness would be untasted. I would see her face and die! I would trace, day by day, the workings of the poison; and in the last moments of her agony I would reveal

myself, and would point to my withered frame and the hand of death upon my forehead, and cry out to her that the Order of the White Hyacinth had kept its vow. I would have her eyes meet mine as the mists of death closed in upon her. I would have her know that the oath of a Marioni, in friendship or in hate, in protection or in vengeance, is one with his honor. This may not be, Margharita! I cannot see all this! I cannot even stand by her bedside for a moment and show her my face, that she might know whose hand it is which has stricken her down. Yet, I must be near! Fear not but that I shall manage it safely! I would not bring danger or the shadow of danger upon you, my beloved.

"I leave Rome to-night, and I leave it with joy. You cannot imagine how inexpressibly sad it has been for me to find myself in the place where the greater part of my youth—my too ambitious youth was spent. All is changed and strange to me. There are new streets and many innovations which puzzle me; and although my friends are kind, twenty-five years have crushed our sympathies. To them I am like a sad figure from a bygone world, a Banquo at the feast, something to pity a little—no more. I am nothing to anybody beyond that. I am a wearisome old man,

whose mind is a blank, and who only cumbers the way. Ah, well, it is not for long. The day of my desire is at hand, and God has given me you, Margharita, to accomplish it, and to close my eyes in peace. Bless you, my dear, dear child! You have sweetened the end of a marred and wretched life! Yours has been an angel's task, and you will have an angel's reward.

"We shall meet before long, but of the manner of our meeting I cannot tell you yet. Till then adieu!—Yours in hope,

"LEONARDO DI MARIONI.

"P. S.—I forgot to say that the whole of the poison, or even half a teaspoonful, would produce sudden and abrupt death. Just a pinch, administered twice, perhaps, in order to be quite secure, would be sufficient."

Enclosed in the letter was the oblong envelope he spoke of, which I carefully opened. It contained only a small quantity of pale pink powder, which emitted a faint pungent odor. I locked it up in my desk, and destroyed the letter.

All my strength had returned. I felt myself free from the madness of this overmastering love. Another passion for the moment had

taken its place. The vision of that old man, wandering about the streets of Rome, with a sad, weary heart and tottering limbs out of touch with the times, a figure for a half-contemptuous pity; that is the picture which I saw steadily before me to nerve my heart and purpose, and well it succeeded.

The second bell roused me from my thoughts. I hastily rose from my chair, and attired myself in the plainest gown which I possessed. I unlocked my desk, and thrust the little packet into my pocket. Then, without jewelry or flowers, and with my hair plainly coiled upon my head, I went downstairs.

They had commenced dinner when I arrived, and Lord Lumley glanced reproachfully at me as I took my seat. From the sudden silence directly I entered, I imagined they had been talking of me, and I made my excuses with a momentary nervousness. There was something unusual in the air. It seemed to me that Lady St. Maurice was regarding me with a new and kindly interest. She said nothing, as I had dreaded she would, of my long absence from the house, and Lord St. Maurice, with a courtesy unusual even for him, rose when I entered, and motioning the butler away, himself held my chair. What did it all mean? At another time I might have wondered more, but

just then there were other thoughts in my mind. Should I have an opportunity to commit my crime that night? I feared not.

I gave no one any chance for sentimental conversation during dinner time, for I talked more than usual, and in a lighter vein. I wanted nothing said which could bring back to my memory that wild scene on the cliffs, or the hours of agony which I had been through. All such things were of the past. I desired to be able to look back upon them as upon some strange night-dream—fair enough of itself, but gone with the first breath of morning. To my relief, the others, too, avoided the subject. There was nothing said about Lord Lumley's escape which even bordered upon the pathetic.

Dinner, which seemed to me to last longer than usual, came to an end at last. I had planned to make some excuse to the Countess, and leave the drawing-room before Lord Lumley could follow, but, as I had half expected that he might, Lord Lumley accompanied us there without waiting to smoke. To my surprise, Lady St. Maurice, before I could frame an excuse to her for my own departure, left us alone. Lord Lumley held the door open for her, and it seemed to me that a meaning glance passed between them. It was beyond my understanding. I could only see that my plans

were frustrated, and that I must prepare for another struggle.

He shut the door carefully, and then came back and stood over me. I looked at him calmly. How could he read the agony in my heart.

"I am waiting for my answer, Margharita!" he said simply.

"You have had the only answer which I can ever give you, Lord Lumley! I answered—'No!'"

Then he did a thing which sounds very absurd, but which did not indeed seem so. He sank on one knee and took possession of my hand. I was on a low chair, and his face now was on a level with mine.

"Margharita, my love," he whispered, "'no' is an answer which I shall never take. Yesterday I went away and left you, to-day I am wiser. Nothing can undo those few minutes on the cliffs, dearest. You love me! Ah! you cannot deny it! Have I not read it in your face, and in your eyes? Take back your 'no,' Margharita. By the memory of those few minutes, you are mine forever! You have not the power or the right to deny yourself to me. You are mine! You belong to me!"

I shrank back. I began to be frightened at

his earnestness—at the note of triumph in his voice. How strong and masterful he was. Should I be able to hold out against him? Only my will and the memory of a wasted life against my heart and such pleading as this. It was a hard, unequal battle.

"Margharita, I love you all the more that you are not lightly won!" he continued, drawing me closer to him—almost into his arms. "Listen! I believe that I have some idea as to the reason of your answer. You think, perhaps, that my people might not be willing. You are proud—too proud. Tell me, is this not so?"

"A governess is no fitting wife for you. You should choose one from among the noble women of your country. I——"

He interrupted me. If I had not drawn back quickly he would have stopped my lips with a kiss.

"No one in this world could be as fit as you, for it is you, and you only, whom I love. But listen! I have spoken to my mother. I have told her."

"You have told her what?" I cried.

"That I love you. That I have asked you to be my wife."

"What did she say?"

"What a true woman and good mother

should say; that if you were indeed my choice, then she was ready to welcome you as her daughter, and my wife."

"You cannot mean it!" I cried. "She knows nothing of me, and I am penniless."

"She knows that I love you, and that would be sufficient, dearest. But, as it happens, she knew more about you than I did. From her I learned, for the first time, that your mother came from a family which was great and noble before ours was ever founded. She told me a sad story of your uncle, Margharita, which you, too, doubtless know of, and she seemed glad to think that our marriage would be, in a certain sense, an act of poetic justice. She told me, too, Margharita, that if your uncle died unmarried, you could, if you chose, take his name and call yourself the Countess di Marioni. Why, sweetheart, I am not sure that I ought to aspire to the hand of so great a lady."

"Your mother, the Countess of St. Maurice, told you all this? She desires our marriage? She knows what you are asking me?" I repeated breathlessly.

"Most certainly! Shall I call her? She will tell you so herself."

"Do not speak to me for a moment, please." I was an idiot, but I could not help it. I

buried my head in the sofa cushion, and sobbed. Everything seemed fighting against me, to make my purpose more difficult.

I think that tears have a softening effect. I had steeled my heart against my lover, and yet he conquered. I felt his strong arms around me, and his lips were pressed against my wet cheeks. Oh! for strength to thrust him from me—to deny my love, but I could not.

Why should I try to recall his words? Nay! if I could, I would not set them down here! I felt every fiber of my nature glowing with delight as I listened; every chord seemed quivering with heart-stirring music. I had given up all idea of resistance. A strange drowsy peace had stolen in upon me. One of his arms was around my waist, and my hand was imprisoned in his. So we sat, and the moments became golden.

Interruption came at last. The door opened, and Lady St. Maurice entered. My lover rose at once, still holding my hand.

"Mother," he said, "Margharita has made me very happy. Will you speak to her?"

She came to us, and bent over me, her face looking very soft and sweet in the shaded light. In another moment she would have kissed me. I sprang to my feet, pale with horror.

"No, no, it cannot be!" I cried. "I am not

fit to be his wife—to be anybody's wife! Lady St. Maurice, will you not tell him so for me? Let me go away!"

She looked surprised at my agitation, but she little guessed its cause. How was she to know anything of that little packet which seemed to be burning a hole in my heart?

"No! I will not tell him that!" she said, smiling. "He loves you, and I believe that you are worthy of his love. That is quite sufficient. I shall be glad to have you for a daughter, Margharita."

Lord Lumley thanked her with a look, and took her hand. They stood together on the hearthrug, and I was on the other side facing the window. Suddenly my heart gave a great leap, and the color died out of my face. Pressed against the dark pane I could see a pale, white face watching us. It was the face of my uncle, Count di Marioni.

I stood swaying backward and forward for a moment, sick and dizzy with the horror of it. My eyes grew dim, and a mist seemed to fill the room. Then I felt myself sink back into my lover's arms, and memory became a blank. I had fainted.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ONE DAY'S RESPITE

THE sun has risen upon the last day which I shall spend on earth; and I sit down calmly to write all that happened to me yesterday, and my reason for the step which I am about to take.

It is a fair still morning, and the birds are singing gaily in the grove. My window is open, and the early freshness of the autumnal air is filling the room. For hours I have been on my bed there, hot and restless, praying for the dawn, that I might carry out my purpose; and as soon as the first faint gleam of light in the east broke through the dark night clouds, I arose and bathed my eyes and sat down here to wait. I have watched the sun rise up from the ocean, slowly gathering strength until its first quivering beams glanced across the dull gray sea, and even penetrated into my chamber. And with the dawn has come peace. I sit here calm and prepared for the trial to come.

It was the evening before yesterday when I

saw my uncle's face pressed against the window pane, and fainted with the shock. Early on the following morning a note from him was brought up to me, having been left by a messenger from the village. Here it is:—

"My beloved Margharita,—Many a time have I reproached myself for my imprudence last night, and the effects which I fear it had upon you. It was thoughtless and rash of me to come near the house at all; but, indeed, I meant only to watch from a safe distance; only, as I crouched behind a shrub upon the lawn, I saw her face, and the sight drew me nearer against my better judgment. I met your eyes, and I knew that you were overcome with fright; but I feared to linger lest they might ask what it was that alarmed you, and seek for me. And although I fancy that I am altered past recognition, yet I would run no risks.

"I, too, had a great surprise, Margharita. You will not wonder what I mean by that when I tell you that in the light which streamed from the uncurtained window everything in the room was distinctly visible to me. Was I dreaming, child, or were you indeed assenting to the embrace of the man whose arms were surely around you? Him, I could not see, for

his back was turned to the window; but will you laugh at me, I wonder, if I tell you that I felt strangely jealous of him. I am a foolish old man, Margharita, but all the love of my heart is yours, and I had begun almost to look upon you—in my thoughts—as my own child. I cannot bear the thought of giving you up to any one. You will not think me very, very selfish. I have only a few more months to live, and I know that you will not grudge that much out of your future, that you will stay by me to the end. Afterwards, I have no wish save for your happiness; and although I must confess that I had hoped you might have married one of the sons of our own country, still it is you who must choose, and I owe you, or shall owe you soon, too great a debt to press upon you any desire of mine which is not at one with your wishes. But tell me this—Is he an Englishman? Alas! I fear so. Send me a word by the bearer, and tell me; tell me, too, of what family he is, and whether he is noble. But of that I feel already assured, if he be indeed the man to whom your love is given.

"You must surely have sustained a shock at my sudden and rash appearance. Doubtless you wonder at seeing me here at all. I could not keep away. I must have news day by day, almost hour by hour. It is all that keeps me

alive. I must be near to feel that I am breathing the same air as the woman on whom a long-delayed vengeance is about to fall.

"I have taken a furnished cottage on the outskirts of this village, and a little more than a mile from Mallory Grange. But do not come to me. Dearly as I would love to have you talk to me, and hear from your own lips that all goes well, yet at present it were better not. I will devise some means of communication, and let you know of it shortly. I am living here as Mr. Angus.—Yours ever,

"L. M."

I folded up this letter with a shudder, and sitting down dashed off my reply. It is here:—

"My dear Uncle,—I am a culprit—a miserable, pleading culprit. It is true that I love an Englishman—the man who was standing by my side last night; and it is true that he has asked me to marry him. But I have not told him so, and I have not promised to marry him. That is not all of my confession. Not only is he an Englishman, but his name is Lord Lumley St. Maurice, and he is—her son.

"Now you know the terrible trouble I am in. Last night he was telling me of his love, and

assuring me of his mother's sanction and approval, when your face appeared at the window. Can you wonder at my start, and that I fainted? Can you wonder that I sit here, after a sleepless night, with eyes that are dim and a heart that has become a stone? I dread to stir from the room. My position is horrible. I have tried my utmost to avoid him, to treat him with disdain, to send him away from me. I have steeled my heart and clothed my face with frowns—in vain! The bald fact remains that I love him. Do you despise me, uncle? Sometimes I feel that I deserve it; but I have suffered, I am suffering now. I am punished. Do not add your anger to my load!

"Immediately you get this, sit down and write to me. Write to me just what is in your heart. Your words I shall set before me as my law. Do not delay, and, if you blame, do not fail to pity me.—Yours ever unchanged,

"MARGHARITA."

I sent this letter off with a certain sense of relief, and then, finding by my watch that it was late, finished dressing hastily, and went down into the schoolroom. Instead of my pupil, Lord Lumley was there lounging in my low basket-chair, yawning over a German grammar. He sprang up as I entered, and

throwing the book into a corner of the room, advanced toward me with outstretched hands.

"Margharita, you are better, dear? I have been waiting here more than an hour for you."

Then, before I could prevent him, he had kissed me. Let me be honest, though, here, at any rate. Did I really try to prevent him? I think not.

"Where is Gracie?" I asked, looking round. "And what have you done to my *Ottos?*"

"Gracie has gone out with the nurse," he answered, laughing, "and as for that wretched volume, well, I've got a good mind to send the rest after it. You've a nasty brain-worrying lot of lesson books here. I've been looking through them."

"One cannot teach without them. Elementary books always look tiresome, but they are indispensable."

"Not for you any longer, I'm glad to say," he remarked.

"Why not?"

He looked at me, surprised.

"Surely you don't expect to go on teaching that child?" he asked. "You are a visitor here now, and I am responsible for your entertainment. To commence with, I have invited myself to breakfast with you. The tray is here,

as you perceive, and the kettle is boiling. Kindly make the tea."

I did as I was bid, with a meekness which astonished myself, and he sat opposite to me. The servant brought in the remainder of the things, and closed the door. Gracie was not coming.

"Well, how do you like the first item in my programme?" he asked, taking my hand for a moment between his. "A *tête-à-tête* breakfast was not a bad idea, was it?"

"Does Lady St. Maurice know?" I asked, suddenly conscious of the utter impropriety of what we were doing.

He laughed reassuringly.

"Of course she does, sweetheart. In fact, she as good as suggested it. She thinks you feel a little strange about it all, and that a long, quiet day alone with me would help you to realize matters. Accordingly, I am having a luncheon basket packed, and after breakfast we are going for a sail, just you and I. You see the sea is as calm as a duck pond this morning. Shall you like it, do you think?"

Like it! Oh! how long was this mockery to go on! How long before I could find strength to tell him the truth—that this thing could never be! I tried to tell him then, but the words died away upon my lips. I would

give myself one more day. After that there must be action of some sort or other. My uncle's reply would have come, and I should know exactly what lay before me.

"I should like it, yes," I answered, looking into my lover's handsome, glowing face. "You are sure that your mother will not mind—that she approves?"

"Quite," he answered confidently. "We talked it over together for some time. To-night I am going to speak to my father. He has an inkling of it already, but he will expect me to tell him. Dearest, there is nothing to be frightened about. Why should you tremble so? You are not well?"

"I shall be better out of doors," I answered faintly. "I will get my hat, and we will start."

He rose up at once, and opened the door for me.

"Do. There must be a little pink coloring in those cheeks before we get back," he said fondly.

"Let us meet at the boat-house in a quarter of an hour. Shall you be ready by then?"

"Yes," I answered. "I will be there."

CHAPTER XXIX

THERE IS DEATH BEFORE US

I DID not give myself time to think. I had made up my mind with a sort of desperate determination that this day should be my very own, my own to spend in paradise, without scruples or after thought. In a few minutes my black dress was changed for a navy blue one and a straw hat, and I was hurrying down to the beach. Our boat, a dainty little skiff, only large enough for two, was ready when I got there, and Lord Lumley was standing up unfurling the sail.

I settled myself down comfortably in the cushioned seat, and we were off almost at once, gliding over the smooth surface of the water with a scarcely perceptible motion. We were about a quarter of a mile from the shore when we met Lord Lumley's yacht, rounding the point on her way back from Yarmouth. Lord Lumley stood up in the bows and hailed her.

"All well, Dyson?" he cried, as she swept past.

"All well, my Lord!" was the prompt reply.

"Is the breeze stiffening, do you think? It's calm enough here, but I see the white horses are showing their heads outside the bay."

"Ay! ay! my Lord, it's blowing hard round the headland. You'll have to keep her well away. Shall we take you up?"

Lord Lumley shook his head.

"You would not prefer the yacht?" he asked, turning to me.

"I like this best," I answered. "It is more exciting."

"We'll stick to the skiff, Dyson," Lord Lumley called out.

The man looked doubtful; but while he hesitated, we shot far ahead, so that his voice only reached us faintly.

"There's a heavy sea running, my Lord, and it'll blow great guns before night."

"Are you nervous, Margharita?" he asked tenderly.

"Not in the least," I answered, carelessly wiping the spray from my face. "I like it, and hope it will be rougher."

"Can't say that I do," he laughed. "What a plucky girl you are. Now that we're in a quieter sea, I think that I may venture to come and talk to you."

So he came and sat by my side. It is not my purpose to set down all that passed between

us that day. There are pages in our lives which we never willingly open; which have for us a peculiar sacredness, and a sweetness which never altogether fades away. There came a sort of abandon upon me, the forerunner of a fit of nervous desperation which well-nigh sent us both, hand in hand, into another world—closed the gates of my memory upon the past, and withdrew my shuddering thoughts from the future, to steep them in the delight of the present. My lover sat by my side, and his words were filling my heart with music. The strong sea breeze blew in our faces, and the salt spray leaped like glittering silver into the sunlight. Over our heads the sea-gulls screamed, and the coast line grew faint in the distance. So we sailed on, hand in hand, heart whispering to heart in the golden silence, till the sun lay low in the west, and our tiny craft pitched and tossed in the trough of the ocean waves.

Then my lover suddenly became conscious of time and place, and he sprang up bewildered.

"A miracle!" he cried. "The sun is low, and it cannot yet be afternoon."

"Flatterer," I laughed, showing him my watch. "It is past five o'clock."

He looked round as he gathered in the sail, and a shade of anxiety crept into his face.

Especially he looked with bewildered eyes at the faint blue line where land lay.

"What an idiot I have been," he said, knitting his brows. "Port, Margharita! The left string! That's right! Now, sit firm, and when we go down, lean to the other side. You mustn't mind if you get a little wet. We are running in the teeth of the wind, and it will be roughish."

It was deliciously exhilarating. The breeze, without our noticing it, had been gradually freshening, and now it was almost a gale. The sky above was mackerel-hued and wind-swept. The sea seemed to be getting rougher every minute. Lord Lumley had to pass his arm round the frail mast which creaked and bent with the straining of the sail. Once we heeled right over, and were within an ace of being capsized. I only laughed, and the color came into my cheeks. Death would be a sweet and welcome thing, I thought—death here on the ocean, with my lover's arms around me. So I had no fear, and Lord Lumley found time to glance at me admiringly.

"You're the pluckiest woman I ever knew in all my life!" he exclaimed lightly. "Gad! that was a shave! It's no use, dear, we must tack. This is too good to last."

Round we swept, first one way then another,

but we made no headway. In an hour's time we were no nearer land, and in the gathering twilight the coast line was dim and blurred. Here and there we could see a few lights burning from the villages along the shore, and away northward the revolving light from Gorton headland shone out like a beacon.

"What will become of us?" I asked softly, for Lord Lumley had ceased his exertions for a moment with a little gesture of despair. His face was very pale, but it might have been from fatigue.

"Nothing very serious. Fortunately the sail is a new one, and very strong. I think it will hold, and while it does, I can keep her in position. We shall be tacking about most of the night, though, I am afraid. It is such a provoking shifty wind. I can't depend upon it for a moment."

"And supposing the sail went?"

"We have the oars. It would be uncommonly hard work, rowing, but it would keep us afloat. It was just a chance that I put them in—a lucky one as it happens."

"Supposing you had forgotten them, and that we had no oars?"

Lord Lumley shook his head.

"Don't add to the horrors," he said, smiling.

"I'd rather not suppose anything of the kind. It's bad enough as it is."

"There would be danger, then?"

"Yes."

"In what way?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Do you really want to know?"

"Yes, please."

"Well, we should drift out to sea, and the first heavy wave that caught us broadside would probably swamp us. The great thing is, you see, to keep our head to the waves. Are you cold, love?"

I shook my head. I had no thought of it.

"Frightened?"

"Not a bit of it. Do I look it?"

"That you don't," he answered, smiling. "You are brave, dearest. I shall never forgive myself for being so careless, though."

I think that it was then that the madness first came to me. I held my hands up to my head, and strove to fight against that frantic impulse. The air seemed full of voices whispering to me to end by one swift stroke this hideous dilemma into which I had drifted of my own foolish will. It was so simple; so easy a manner of escape. And she, too, would be punished. In a manner, my oath would have been accomplished. What vengeance

could be sweeter to the heart of that desolate old man than the death of her son—her only son? It could be done so easily, so secretly. And as for me, should I not die in his arms with his dear face pressed close to mine, his kisses upon my cold lips, and his voice the last to fall upon my ears? What was life to me, a pledged murderess? Would not such a death be a thousand times better? The wind rushing across the waters seemed to bring mocking whispers to my ears. I seemed to read it in the silent stars, and in the voices of the night. Death, painless and sudden. Death, in my lover's arms. My heart yearned for it.

In the darkness I stretched down my hand, and felt for the oars. My lover's back was turned to me, for he was on his knees in the bows, gazing ahead with strained eyesight. One oar I raised and balanced on the side of the boat. A quick push, and it was gone. The dull splash in the water was lost in the rushing of the wind and the creaking of the ropes. I watched it drift away from us with anxious eyes. It was gone, irrevocably gone.

There was only the sail now. I had not meant to touch that; to leave so much to chance, but the desire for death had grown. I was no longer mistress of myself. A small pocket-knife was lying in the bottom of the

boat, and I stooped down cautiously and picked it up. Just as my fingers closed upon it, Lord Lumley looked round. My eyes fell before his, and I trembled, thankful for the darkness.

"Frightened yet, dearest?" he asked tenderly.

I laughed. There was no fear in my heart. If only he had known.

"No! I am not afraid! I am happy!"

He looked at me, wondering. Well he might!

"How your eyes are gleaming, love! After all, I don't think that we need a lantern!"

"A lantern! What use would it have been to us?"

"To warn anything off from running us down. If the sail holds till morning, and I think it will, we shall be all right if we escape collisions."

"Is that what you are fearing?" I asked.

"Yes. I fancy that we must be getting in the track of the coal steamers. If only the moon would rise! This darkness is our greatest danger! Even if they had a smart lookout man, I am afraid that they would never see us."

He turned round again, and remained gazing with fixed eyes into the darkness. Then I held my breath, and stooping forward, with

the penknife in my hand, commenced steadily sawing at the bottom knot which bound the sail to the mast. Directly it parted I cut a great slit in the sail itself.

The knife was sharp, and my task was over in less than a minute. I dropped it into the sea, and leaned back breathless. The wind was coming.

"Lumley!" I faltered, "will you come to me? I am afraid!"

He turned round with a quick loving word. At that moment the catastrophe happened. A sudden gust of wind filled out the sail. There was a crash as it parted from the mast, a confused mass of canvass and limp rope. The whole of the strain for a moment was upon the topmost portion of the mast, and the result was inevitable. It snapped short, and the whole tangled heap fell down, half in the bottom of the boat, half in the sea.

We heeled right over, and it seemed as if we must be capsized. But my lover had presence of mind, and a strong desire to live. He leaned heavily on the other side of the boat, and whipping a large sailor's knife from his pocket, cut away the whole of the wreckage from the stump of the mast with a few lightning-like strokes. It fell away overboard at once, and though we shipped a lot of water, the boat

righted itself again. While it was yet trembling with the shock he leaned across to me, pale, but with no fear in his set face or his clear, resolute tone.

"Courage, Margharita! The oars! Quick, dear!"

Then for the first time my heart smote me for what I had done; for the passionate desire of life was alight in his eyes. What right had I to make him share my fate? My deep joy was suddenly numbed. I was a murderess!

I handed him the remaining one, and pretended to feel about in the bottom of the boat. In that moment I recovered myself.

"There is only one here," I announced calmly.

"Impossible!" he cried. "I saw the pair laid out myself."

He dropped on his knee and felt anxiously around. Then he struck a match; with the same result. The oar was gone.

He knew then that my words were true, and he came over to my side with a great despair in his dark eyes.

"Margharita!" he cried, taking me into his arms, "there is death before us, and it is I who have brought it upon you. Oh, my love, my love!"

His kisses fell upon my lips, and my head

fell upon his shoulder. Then I drew a sigh of deep content, and I felt that I had done well.

"I do not mind," I whispered softly. "Let us stay like this. I am happy."

"My darling!"

CHAPTER XXX

THE DAWN OF A NEW LIFE

To desire death is to live, and to desire life is to die. It is the mockery of human existence, the experience of all. I had willed to die at that moment, without further speech or opportunity for thought, and death seemed to have turned his back upon me.

We drifted on, tossed high and low by the tall waves which rose around us like black shadows, threatening destruction at every moment. Often when we had seen one towering above us we had thought that the end had come, and I had felt my lover's arms tighten around me, and my lips had clung close to his. But again and again a reprieve was granted to us. Although every timber in our frail craft shivered, we survived the shock and drifted into smoother water.

A little before midnight the wind dropped, although there was a heavy sea still running. Through a dimly woven mist we could see the stars faintly shining between the masses of black clouds rolling across the wind-swept sky.

But there was no moon; nothing to show us whither we were drifting upon the waste of waters. There was something inexpressibly weird in that darkness. It seemed less a blank darkness than a darkness of moving shapes and figures—a living darkness, somehow suggesting death. It will live in my memory forever.

"Do you mind dying, Lumley?" I asked him once.

"Yes," he answered solemnly, "I do. I am just learning how sweet it would be to live."

I held him tighter, for at that moment a great wave had broken over us. I dreaded nothing but separation.

"Supposing that, if we lived, something came between us?" I whispered. "Suppose there was something between us which nothing could alter, nothing could move—what then?"

"I cannot suppose it," he answered. "Nothing could come between us that I would not overcome—nothing in life."

"Still, if it were so?" I persisted.

"Then I would sooner die like this if we are to die. We are in God's hands."

I shuddered at that last sentence. If indeed we were on the threshold of eternity, what had I to hope from God? Alas! at that moment

my earthly love was so strong that the fear of death was weak and faint.

We sat there silent and full of strange emotions, and expecting every moment the end to come. All of a sudden, we both of us gave a great cry, and my lover leaped up so that our boat rocked violently and nearly capsized. For my part, I sat still, gazing, with distended eyes and parted lips, upon the strangest sight which I had ever seen.

A great blaze of brilliant light seemed suddenly to flash into the horizon, and falling into one long level ray, to travel slowly across the surface of the water toward us. Everything which lay in its path was revealed to us with minute and wonderful distinctness. So vivid was the illumination that we could see the white foam on the top of the green waves, and the floating seaweed rising and falling. Outside that one level blaze, more brilliant even than the sunlight, the darkness seemed blacker and more impenetrable than ever. It was a sight so marvelous that I held my breath, awed and wondering. Then my lover gave a great cry.

"Margharita, my love, my love, we are saved!"

"What is it?" I whispered.

"The electric search light. I had it fitted to

the *Stormy Petrel* by the purest chance a few months ago. Here it comes. Put your hand before your eyes, sweetheart. Oh, God, that they may see us!"

Swiftly it passed across the great desert of waters, and reached us. We seemed suddenly bathed in a blinding glare of white light, and, notwithstanding our anxiety, were forced to cover our eyes. There was a moment's suspense. Then the sound of a cannon came booming across the sea, and a rocket sped up into the air.

"Thank God! thank God!" my lover cried, "they have seen us. Look up, Margharita! They are more than a mile away now, but they will be here in a quarter of an hour. We are saved!"

He was right. In less than that time a boat from the *Stormy Petrel* had picked us up, and we were standing in for land, firing rockets all the way to announce the news to Lord and Lady St. Maurice. So ended this, the most eventful day of my life.

And with its close has ended that sworn purpose which has brought me here. I, Margharita di Marioni, as one day I had hoped to call myself, am about to disgrace the traditions and honor of my race. I am going to break my faith with a suffering old man. I

am going to tell my uncle that my hand can work no harm upon any of this family.

Before me here lies his answer to my letter —my confession to him. How he trusts me, when even now he never doubts.

"MARGHARITA,—I have received your letter, and I have pondered over it. You are young to have such a sorrow, yet I do not doubt but that you will act as becomes your race. You can never think of marriage with this man; you a Marioni, he a St. Maurice! Yet I grieve that you have let such a feeling steal into your heart. Pluck it out, Margharita, I charge you; pluck it out by the roots! Think not of the wrong done to me, or, if you do, think of me not as a man and your uncle, but as Count Leonardo di Marioni, the head of my family, the head of your family. We have been the victims, but the day of our vengeance is at hand. There is no life without its sorrows, child! In the days to come, happiness will teach you to forget this one.

"Farewell, my child. I shall send you no more notes. Write or come to me the moment the deed is done! Come to me, if you can; I would hear your own lips tell me the news. Yet do as seems best to you. In sympathy and love, L. DI M.

"One word more, child. Do not for a moment imagine that I blame you for what has happened. Old man though I am, I too know something of the marvels and the vagaries of this same love. Will can have little to do with its course. I, who have suffered so deeply, Margharita, can and do sympathize and feel for you."

This is the letter. I shall seal it up with the others, and this little record of my life, on the last page of which I am now writing. When I leave here they will go with me.

Yes, it is the dawn of a new day. Shall I ever see another, I wonder? I think not! For me, no longer will the sun rise and set, the breezes blow, and the earth be fair and sweet. All these things might have been so much to me, for I have held in my hand the key to an everlasting happiness—that deathless love which opens the gates to heaven; which sanctifies life and hallows death. Oh! forgive me that I leave you, my love! There was no other way. Only I pray that in that other world we may meet again in the days to come, and that the music of our love may ring once more through heart and soul. Farewell! Farewell!

CHAPTER XXXI

AN OLD MAN'S HATE

"MARGHARITA! You have come at last. It is done, then. Say that it is done!"

She stood quite still in the humble red-tiled sitting-room, and looked at him with a great compassion shining out of her dark, clear eyes. He was worn almost to a shadow, and his limbs were shaking with weakness, as he half rose to greet her. Only his eyes were still alight and burning. Save for them he might have been a corpse.

Something of the old passionate pity swept through her as she stood there, but its fierceness had died away. Her heart leaped no longer in quick response to the fire in those still undimmed eyes. She had been a girl then, a girl with all the fierce untrained nature of her mother's race; she was a woman now, a sad-faced, sorrowful woman. He was quick to see the change.

"Margharita, my child, you have been ill."

Still she did not answer. Silently she knelt down by the side of his armchair and took

his withered, delicate hand in hers. A great bowl of white hyacinths stood on a table by the window, and the air was faint with their perfume.

"I am not ill," she said gently. "I was frightened on my way here, and had to run. There was a fire last night at the lunatic asylum at Fritton, and some of the mad people have escaped. I saw one of them in the distance, and the keepers after him. They wanted me to go back, but I would come."

He stooped down and kissed her forehead, with cold, dry lips.

"I knew that you would be here soon," he said. "My letters reached you safely?"

"Yes."

She shuddered at the gathering strength in his tone, and the fierce light which had swept into his face.

"It is done, child. Say that it is done!"

"No."

Something in her sad tone and subdued manner seemed to strike a note of fear in his heart. He leaned forward, grasping the sides of his chair with nervous, quivering fingers, and looked hurriedly into her face.

"No; you have had no chance, then? But you will have soon? Is it not so? Soon, very soon?"

She threw her arms around his neck. He made no response, nor did he thrust her away. He remained quite passive.

"It is not that, uncle. Oh, listen to me. Do not thrust me away. I cannot do this thing."

He sat as still as marble. There was no change, no emotion in his face. Yet her heart sank within her.

"Oh, listen to me," she pleaded passionately. "You do not know her as she is now. She is good and kind—a gentle-hearted woman. It was so long ago; and it was not out of malice to you, but to save the man she loved. You hear me, do you not? You are listening. She has not forgotten you. Often she sorrows for you. It was cruel—I know that it was cruel—but she was a woman, and she loved him. Let us steal away together and bury these dark dreams of the past. I will never leave you; I will wait upon you always; I will be your slave. Forgiveness is more sweet than vengeance. Oh, tell me that it shall be so. Why do you not speak to me?"

He sat quite still, like a man who is stunned by some sudden and unexpected blow. He seemed dazed. She wondered, even, whether he had heard her.

"Uncle, shall it not be so?" she whispered. "Let us go away from here and leave her. I

am not thinking about him. I will not see him again. I will never dream of marrying him. Let us go this very day, this very hour!"

Then he turned slowly toward her, thrust her hand from around his neck, and stood up.

"You have been false to me, Margharita," he said, in a slow, quiet tone. "After all, it is only natural. When you first came to me, I thought I saw your mother's spirit blazing in your dark eyes, and I trusted you. I was to blame. I forgot the tradesman's blood. I do not curse you. You do not understand, that is all. Learn now that the oath of a Marioni is as deathless and unchangeable as the hills of his native land. Will you go away at once, please? I do not wish to see you again."

His speech so quiet, so self-contained, bewildered her. There was not a single trace of passion or bitterness in it. She stretched out her hands toward him, but she felt chilled.

"Uncle, you——"

"Will you go away, please?" he interrupted coldly.

She turned toward the door, weeping. She had not meant to go far—only out on to the garden-seat, where she might sit and think. But he saw another purpose in her departure, and a sudden passion fired him. She heard

his step as he rose hastily, and she felt his cold fingers upon her wrist.

"You would go to warn her!" he cried, his voice trembling with anger; "I read it in your face. You are as false as sin, but you shall not rob me of the crown of my life! No one shall rob me of it! Vengeance belongs to me, and by this symbol of my oath I will have it!"

He snatched a handful of white blossoms from the bowl, and crushed them in his fingers. Then he threw them upon the ground and trampled upon them.

"Thus did she betray the sacred bonds of our Order when, for her lover's sake, she added treachery to cunning, and wrecked my life, made Leonardo, Count of the Marionis, the lonely inmate of prison walls, the scorn and pity of all men. Thus did she write her own fate upon a far future page of the tablets of time. Talk to me not of forgiveness or mercy, girl! My hate lives in me as the breath of my body, and with my body alone will it die!"

His withered figure seemed to have gathered strength and dignity, and his appearance and tone, as he gazed scornfully down at the girl at his feet, was full of a strange dramatic force. Her heart sank as she listened to him. This was no idle, vulgar passion, no morbid craving

for evil, which animated him. It was a purpose which had become hallowed to him; something which he had come to look upon as his sacred right. She understood how her drawing back must seem to him. As though a flash of light had laid bare his mind, she saw how weak, how pitifully weak, any words of hers must sound, so she was silent.

He had commenced walking up and down the room; and, watching him fearfully, she saw that his manner was gradually changing. The unnatural calm into which he had momentarily relapsed was leaving him, and he was becoming every moment more and more excited. Fire flashed in his eyes, and he was muttering broken words and sentences to himself. Once he raised his clasped hands to the roof in a threatening gesture, and in the act of doing so she saw the blue flash of a stiletto in his breast pocket. It frightened her, and she moved toward the door.

It seemed almost as though he read her purpose in her terror-stricken face, and it maddened him. He caught her by the wrist and thrust her back.

"You shall not leave this room, girl!" he cried. "Wait, and soon I will bring you news!"

She stood, still panting, overcome for a

moment by the strength of his grip. Before she could recover herself, he had caught up his hat and was gone. Outside, she heard the sound of a key in the lock. She was a prisoner!

Her first thought was the window. Alas! it was too small even for her to get her head through. She cried out. No one answered; there was no one to answer. She was alone in the cottage, and helpless, and away over the cliffs, toward Mallory Grange, she could see a small, dark figure walking steadily along, with bent head and swift steps. The cottage stood by itself, a mile from the village, and was approached only by a cliff path. She turned away from the window in despair. It seemed to her then that the time for her final sacrifice had indeed come.

It was a warm, drowsy morning, and the air which floated in through the open lattice window was heavy with the perfume of flowers, mingled with the faint ozone of the sea. Outside, the placid silence was broken only by the murmurous buzzing of insects and the soft lapping of the tide upon the shingly sands. Within the room, a pale-faced girl knelt upon the floor, with her long, slim fingers stretched upward, and the passionate despair of death in her cold, white features. The sunshine

laughed upon her hair, and glanced around her, bathing her beautiful face in its fresh, bright glory. Was it an answer to her prayer, she wondered—her prayer for peace and forgiveness? Oh, that it might be so! God grant it!

There was no fear in her face, though only a moment before she had taken out and swallowed the contents of that little packet of poison which had burned in her bosom for those last few days. But there had been just one passing shade of bitterness. Her life had been so short, so joyless, until there had come to her that brief taste of wonderful, amazing happiness. She was young to die—to die with the delirium of that passionate joy still burning in her veins.

"Yet, after all, it is best!" she whispered softly, at the end of that unspoken prayer; and with those words of calm resignation, a change crept softly in upon her face. It seemed almost as though, while yet on earth, there had come to her a touch of that exquisite spiritual beauty which follows only upon the extinction of all earthly passion, and the uplifting into a purer, sweeter life. And her eyes closed upon the sunlight, and darkness stole in upon her senses. She lay quite still upon the floor; but the smile still lingered upon her lips, making

her face more lovely even in its cold repose than when the glow of youth and life had shone in her dark, clear eyes, and lent expression to her features. Saints like St. Francis of Assisi may die thus, but seldom women.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE KEEPING OF THE OATH

"HELP! For God's sake, help!"

A woman's cry of agony rang out upon the sweet morning stillness. Count Marioni, who had been hurrying on with downcast head, stood still in the cliff path and lifted his head. It was the woman whose memory he had cursed who stood before him—the woman on whom his vengeance was to fall.

Her face was as white as his own, and in the swiftness of her flight her hat had fallen away and her hair was streaming in the breeze. Yet in that moment of her awful fear she recognized him, and shrank back trembling, as though some unseen hand had palsied her tongue, and laid a cold weight upon her heart. They stood face to face, breathless and speechless. A host of forgotten sensations, kindled by her appearance, had leaped up within the Sicilian's heart. He had indeed loved this woman.

"Merciful God! to meet you here," she faltered. "You will help me? Oh, you will help

me? My husband is being murdered there on the cliff by an escaped lunatic. Oh! Leonardo, save him, and you may strike me dead at your feet. It is I whom you should hate, not him. Oh, come! Come, or it will be too late!"

He stood quite still, looking at her curiously.

"And it is I to whom you dare to come for help—I whom you ask to save him—your husband? Adrienne, do you remember my words on the sands at Palermo?"

She wrung her hands, frantically imploring.

"How can I remember anything—think of anything, now? For the love of God, help him," she begged, seizing his hand. "That was all so long ago. You would not have him killed here before my eyes? Come! Oh, do come!"

"Lead the way," he answered sternly. "Call your loudest for other help. I make no promise, but I will see this tragedy."

She ran back along the path, and he followed her. They turned suddenly an abrupt corner, and came upon two men locked in one another's arms, and swaying backward and forward upon the short green turf. The lunatic, an immense fellow, more than six feet high, was clutching his opponent's throat with his left hand, while with his right he brandished a long table-knife with keenly-sharpened edge.

The struggle was virtually over. The madman's strength was more than human, and desperately though he had struggled, Lord St. Maurice was lying exhausted and overcome in his arms.

With a final effort he turned his head at the sound of footsteps, and saw them come—his wife and this shrunken little old man. But close at hand though they were, nothing could help him now. He saw the steel flashing in the sunlight, and he closed his eyes.

The knife descended, but Lord St. Maurice remained unhurt. With a swiftness which seemed almost incredible, the Sicilian had sprung between them, and the knife was quivering in his side. Behind, the lunatic was struggling helplessly in the grasp of three keepers.

There was a wild cry of horror from Lady St. Maurice, a choking gasp of relief from her husband, and a horrid chuckle of triumph from the madman as he gazed upon his handiwork. But after that there was silence—a deep, awe-stricken silence—the silence of those who stand in the presence of death.

Count Marioni lay on the turf where he had sunk, very white and very still, with the blood dropping slowly from his wound upon the grass, and his eyes closed. At first they

thought that he was already dead; but, as though aroused by Lady St. Maurice's broken sobs, he opened his eyes and looked up. His lips moved, and she stooped low down to catch the sound.

"Will you tell Margharita that this was best?" he faltered. "I have heard a whisper from over the sea, and—and the White Hyacinth forgives. I forgive. She will understand."

"Leonardo," she sobbed, "your vengeance——"

He interrupted her.

"This is my vengeance!" he said. "I have kept my oath!"

Then he closed his eyes, and a gray shade stole into his pallid face. A breeze sprung up from the sea, and the tall, blood-red poppies, which stood up all around him like a regiment of soldiers, bent their quivering heads till one or two of them actually touched his cheek. He did not move; he was dead.

. . . . . .

Lord and Lady Lumley had lingered long in Rome, and now, on the eve of their departure, they had spent nearly the whole of a bright November afternoon buying curios of a wizened old dealer, whose shop they had found in one of the dark narrow streets at the back of

the Piazza Angelo. Lady Lumley had taken up a curious old ring, and was examining it with a vague sense of familiarity.

"Ten pounds for that ring, my lady," the curio dealer remarked, "and it has a history. You will see that it bears the arms and motto of the Marionis, once the most powerful family in Sicily. I had it from the late Count himself."

Lady Lumley sank into the little chair by the counter, holding the ring tightly in her hand.

"Will you tell us the history?" she asked in a low tone.

The man hesitated.

"If I do so," he said doubtfully, "will you promise to keep it absolutely secret?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, I have told it to no one yet, but I will tell it to you. Many years ago I was a chemist, and among my customers was Count Leonardo di Marioni. His history was a very sad one, as doubtless you may have heard. When he was quite a young man he was arrested on some political charge, and imprisoned for five-and-twenty years—a cruel time. Well, scarcely more than twelve months ago he came to me here, so altered that I found it hard indeed to recognize him. Poor old gentleman, when he had talked for a while, I

felt quite sure that his long confinement had affected his mind, and his errand with me made me sure of it. He came to buy a celebrated poison which I used at one time to be secretly noted for, and I could tell from his manner that he wanted it for some fatal use. Well, I thought at first of refusing it altogether, but what was the use of that? Some one else would have sold him an equally powerful poison, and the mischief would be done all the same. So, after a little consideration, I made up quite an innocent powder, which might cause a little momentary faintness, but which could do no further harm, and I gave it to him as the real thing. I couldn't take money for doing a thing like that, so he pressed this ring upon me. You see, it really has a history."

Lord Lumley took his wife's hand and pressed it tenderly. In the deep gloom of the shop the curio dealer could not see the tears which glistened in her dark eyes.

"We will have the ring!" Lord Lumley said, taking a note from his pocket-book and handing it across the counter.

The man held it up to the light.

"One hundred pounds," he remarked. "I shall owe your lordship ninety."

Lord Lumley shook his head.

"No, Signor Paschuli, you owe me nothing; it is I who owe you a wife. Come, Margharita, let us get out into the sunshine again."

And Signor Paschuli kept the note. But he has come to the conclusion that all Englishmen traveling on their honeymoon are mad.

THE END